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ABSTRACT

"Northern minorities" is an official term for 26 indigenous peoples who live in a vast northern and Arctic territory (58% of the new Russia, mostly Siberia). These peoples include very different ethnic groups with different cultures and languages, but today they all live in a situation best described as "ethnic catastrophe." The period, covering the 16th-19th centuries was one of Russian colonization and annexation. From the 1920s onward, the official view in the USSR was that minority rights issues had been satisfactorily resolved through communism and the supposedly devolved administrative structure of the Soviet state. However, the rights of various nationalities existed more on paper than in practice. In the 1920s, schools were established in the North, Native languages were included in the curriculum, and 13 alphabets based on the Roman alphabet were developed for northern languages. However, in 1937, the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced and northern alphabets were outlawed. After World War II, the public policy became one of "Russification" and the unity of the Soviet people. Northern peoples were forcibly settled in villages or relocated in mixed groups to new areas. By 1970, none of the 26 ethnic languages but one were any longer used at school. From the age of 2, children were required to attend boarding schools where they were punished for speaking their own languages. The natural resources of the North were exploited without concern for environmental damage. All protest was brutally suppressed. This report contains recommendations on political, economic, and cultural rights of the northern minorities. (SV)

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MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INTERNATIONAL

REPORT

NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE RUSSIAN FAR NORTH

ED354117

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BY NIKOLAI VAKHTIN

MRG

THE MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

is an international research and information unit registered in Britain as an educational charity under the Charities Act of 1960. Its principal aims are –

To secure justice for minority or majority groups suffering discrimination, by investigating their situation and publicizing the facts as widely as possible, to educate and alert public opinion throughout the world.

To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and

To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.

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An Oroki, one of the first inhabitants of Sakhalin Island
(ALEX PAVLOVIEC/NHPA SPOOTLER PICTURE)

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NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE RUSSIAN FAR NORTH

BY NIKOLAI VAKHTIN

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UNITED NATIONS COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS 1966

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (CSCE) 1990

(32) To belong to a national minority is a matter of a person's individual choice and no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such choice.

Persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects, free of any attempts at assimilation against their will. In particular, they have the right

(32.1) to use freely their mother tongue in private as well as in public;

(32.2) to establish and maintain their own educational, cultural and religious institutions, organizations or associations, which can seek voluntary financial and other contributions as well as public assistance, in conformity with national legislation;

(32.3) to profess and practise their religion, including the acquisition, possession and use of religious materials, and to conduct religious educational activities in their mother tongue;

(32.4) to establish and maintain unimpeded contacts among themselves within their country as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin, cultural heritage or religious beliefs;

(32.5) to disseminate, have access to and exchange information in their mother tongue;

(32.1) to establish and maintain organizations or associations within their country and to participate in international non-governmental organizations.

Persons belonging to national minorities can exercise and enjoy their rights individually as well as in community with other members of their group. No disadvantage may arise for a person belonging to a national minority on account of the exercise or non-exercise of any such rights.

UNITED NATIONS DRAFT UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

9 The right to revive, use, develop, promote and transmit to future generations their own languages, writing systems and literature

10 The right to all forms of education, including access to education in their own languages, and the right to establish and control their own educational systems and institutions.

23 The collective right to autonomy in matters relating to their own internal and local affairs, including education, information, mass media, culture, religion, health, housing, social welfare, traditional and other economic activities, land and resources administration and the environment, as well as internal taxation for financing these autonomous functions.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Article 30

'In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.'

PREFACE

Ownership and access to land is an issue of immense significance to tribal and indigenous peoples worldwide. While a great deal of attention has been rightly paid to the perilous situation of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australasia and Asia, very little has been heard of the situation of the 'Northern Minorities' of Siberia. Yet, like other groups, their lands and resources have been stolen, their populations dispersed, their cultures and languages neglected or repressed and their political rights suppressed. Today, they are fighting to retain their lands, cultures and languages.

This report marks the start of a new stage in the work of Minority Rights Group in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Before 1985 direct contacts with researchers in the region were few and sporadic and information on minority situations came mainly through exiles and clandestine channels. This report by Nikolai Vakhtin is the first which MRG has commissioned directly from an author in this region.

Nikolai Vakhtin began his academic career as a linguist specializing in the languages of the 'Northern Minorities', the indigenous peoples of the far north and eastern seaboard. Many native languages were disappearing as the use of Russian was promoted through the boarding-school system, whereby young children were taken from their families and did not return on a permanent basis until late adolescence. The result was a 'broken generation' who had lost their language, culture and, frequently, reason for living. As he became more involved with these communities, Vakhtin realized that unless radical measures were taken, the peoples and their unique way of life were destined to disappear.

From the 1920s onwards the official view of minority rights in the USSR was that the issues had been satisfactorily resolved through Communism and the supposedly devolved administrative structure of the Soviet State. Outwardly, this appeared to have some credibility; each major nationality had its own republic, smaller nationalities had autonomous republics or regions and even the smallest groups had some form of official recognition. However, these rights existed more on paper than in practice and the dominant power was the centralized Communist State, with a language and culture heavily dependent on Russia.

From 1985, the process of *glasnost* and the opening of Soviet society to internal and external scrutiny, demonstrated that minority issues had not been solved and were, in fact, a source of simmering discontent and frustration both with monolithic Communism and Russian chauvinism. The loudest voices came from the most nationally minded republics, where the gap between the promises and the reality of a supposedly devolved state structure were greatest. The increasing ethnic and political tensions of the 1990s resulted in the breakaway of the republics and the dissolution of the USSR.

But this has not ended minority grievances nor stilled minority voices. For many their present situation in the new republics shows little change from the old regime. This is especially true for the smaller peoples, such as the 'Northern Minorities'. As Vakhtin demonstrates in this report, not only have they suffered abuse and discrimination under the Soviet system but because of the totalitarian nature of the system, there were almost no legitimate channels of representation or protest.

The basis of the 'Northern Minorities' way of life is land and water and the animals and fish that live there. Yet the government of the USSR did not respect either the people or the land, seeing it only as an area ripe for exploitation and settlement. Massive industrial projects have destroyed the forests, poisoned the waterways and skies. The native peoples, who lived with their harsh environment for centuries, had to dismantle their traditional habitats and move into arbitrarily designated government settlements. These policies, carried out over a period of 40 years, need to be reconsidered and reversed if native peoples are to survive.

There is today some hope for their future for, as this report shows, over the past few years there has been a resurgence of indigenous political activity, at local, regional, national and international level. There have been successful protests against the siting of factories and other destructive industrial projects by local communities, using the media when the administrative and judicial systems have failed them. The Northern Minorities have established their own national association and have made contacts with other indigenous peoples worldwide. They are demanding the ratification of international standards on Indigenous Peoples by the new Russian State.

This report ends with a series of recommendations which are being presented to the government of Russia and to the international community. These 'Directions for the Future' are not all-inclusive and, by themselves, they cannot solve all the pressing problems facing the Northern Minorities. But they are intended as a guide to good practice and as benchmarks for measuring achievements. The new Russian State has been presented with a great opportunity to prove its commitment to minority rights and the rule of law. Its treatment of its own native peoples will be a crucial test of that commitment.

Alan Phillips
Executive Director
August 1992

GLOSSARY

of terms used in this report

Abbreviations and terms from Russian

Arktikneftegazstroy Arctic Department for Oil and Gas Construction.

Committee of the North Organization responsible for research into and welfare of Northern Minorities, 1924–35.

Dal'stroy the chief administration for the development of the Far North in the 1930s.

Dacha Russian country cottage, used often during holidays and weekends by town dwellers.

Glavsevmorput Central Agency for the Northern Passage. The central government ministry of the 1930s.

GULAG Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Labour Settlements. The extensive prison labour system.

KGB Committee for State Security, 1954–91.

Kolkhoz collective farm.

Narkomnatz Peoples' Commissariat of Nationalities. The Ministry responsible for nationalities and ethnic groups after the 1917 Revolution.

NKVD People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. The Internal Security Ministry (1934–54) and predecessor of the KGB.

Oblastnichestvo Regionalism. A school of political thought of the Siberian intelligentsia in the early 20th Century.

RSFSR Russian Federation. The largest of the constituent republics of the former USSR.

Soviet Council. Also used in a broader sense to refer to the Communist system of administration.

Taiga coniferous forest.

Tundra arctic plain with permanently frozen subsoil and lichens, mosses and dwarfed vegetation.

USSR Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, 1922–91.

Administrative terminology:

Oblast/Krai Province

Okrug Region

Raion District

(See also, diagram on p.14 of this report)

TABLE 1

OFFICIAL NAMES AND SELF-APPELLATIONS

Official names, variants of names and self-appellations [1]

Aleuts,[2] Unangans
Chukchee, Luoravetlans, Oravedlans, Chawchuwats
Chuvans
Dolgans, Sakhas
Entsy,[3] Enneche, Yenisey Samoyeds, Madu
Eskimos,[4] Yupigyts, Yuits
Evenks, Orochons, Tungus
Evens,[5] Lamuts
Itel'mens, Kamchadals
Kets, Yenisey Ostyaks
Khants,[6] Khante, Ostyaks
Koryaks,[7] Nymylans, Chavchuvens
Mansi, Voguls
Nanais, Nani, Gol'ds
Negidals, El'kan Beyenin, Elkembeys
Nenets,[8] Hasava, Yuraks, Samoyeds
Nganasans, Nya, Tavgiyan Samoyeds, Tavgiyans
Nivkhi,[9] Gilyaks
Orochi, Orochili, Nani
Oroks, Ul'ta, Ul'cha
Saami, Lopars
Sel'kups,[10] Ostyak-Samoyeds
Tofalars, Tofa, Tokha, Tufa, Karagas
Udege, Udekhe, Ude
Ul'chi, Nani, Nanei
Yukagirs,[11] Oduls, Vaduls

From: *Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North*, IWGIA, 1990: p.13; *Etnicheskoye razvitiye* 1987, p.p.67, 101.

Notes

1. The list sometimes includes Shors but excludes the Yakuts and Komi.
2. Actually two groups and two languages.
3. Several subgroups and dialects.
4. Three groups and three languages (one nearly extinct).
5. Several subgroups and dialects.
6. Two groups and two groups of dialects.
7. Several subgroups, speaking closely related languages (Alyutor, Karagin, etc.).
8. Several subgroups, speaking different dialects.
9. Several subgroups, speaking languages that are not mutually understood.
10. Several subgroups and several languages.
11. Two groups and two languages.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Northern Minorities' is an official term used to describe the 26 peoples who live in a vast territory covering about 45 per cent of the former USSR and 58 per cent of the new Russian State. This land encompasses almost all of Siberia and stretches along the coastline of the Arctic Ocean from the White Sea in the west to the Bering Strait in the east, including Kamchatka and the island of Sakhalin. Thus 'the North', according to most definitions, measures about 11.1 million sq. km. and is, by comparison, substantially larger than the United States including Alaska.

The Environment

The lands of the Northern Minorities are crossed by several great rivers including the Ob', Enisey, Lena, Kolyma and Amur, and are divided into three separate climatic zones: tundra (Arctic plain, where the subsoil is frozen), forest-tundra and taiga (coniferous forest). The forested region contains elk, bears, squirrels, hares, foxes, martens, ermine and a variety of birds but, further northwards, the forest gives way to tundra between latitude 66° and 70°N. The latter has relatively few species of fauna: reindeer, Arctic foxes, lemmings, snowy owls, ptarmigan, various ducks and geese, several species of salmon as well as fishes similar to those of the forest area.

Summers are short and cool while winters are long, dark and sometimes extremely cold, especially away from the sea. Winter temperatures of the eastern coast (in Chukotka and Kamchatka), as well as those of the westernmost part (close to the Norwegian border) are relatively mild. Yet deeper into the land mass (in Continental Chukotka and Yakutia) the mean January temperatures often reach -50°C, with a maximum of -70°C recorded in Verkhoyansk and Oymyakon. Summer temperatures of +30°C are common.[1]

The People

The phrase 'Northern Minorities' is more of a metaphor than a scholarly term and was first introduced into Soviet legislation by two decrees of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR in 1925 and 1926. Yet, like 'American Indians' or 'Africans', it covers very different ethnic groups which archaeological sources prove have been living in this area for thousands of years and which, in the past, had different subsistence strategies, cultures, mythologies and languages.

Traditionally, there were two main types of economy: reindeer herding, mostly in the tundra; and fishing and hunting in the forest, tundra and the sea. Reindeer herders were nomadic, while hunters and fishers were either permanent settlers or wandered within a limited territory on a seasonal basis. Although culturally very diverse, in the past the Northern Minorities adapted to the climate and seasons so that a Chukchee herder obtained everything he needed from his reindeer, an Eskimo sea-hunter extracted as much from the sea, a Nivkh fisherman managed to find all that was necessary from fishing and hunting.

The houses of the nomads were movable and made of deer skins while the fishermen and sea-hunters lived either in tents made of tree bark, or in semi-subterranean huts covered by skins, or earth and moss. All the peoples used animal skins (deer, fox, wolf, seal, etc.) to make their clothes, and these differed very much in style and design. Transport was by deer- or dog-sledge although some would also ride on deer back.

The languages spoken belong to different language families: Tungus-Manchu, Finno-Ugric, Turkic, and Paleo-Siberian. Many of these languages are linguistic isolates (having no known genetic relations) and none of them are related to Russian in any way.

Today

This report, in spite of its brevity, attempts to cover all the 26 Northern Minorities, each with their own history, problems and characteristics. All the Northern peoples share one common feature that makes writing a general report about them a necessity: today, in the early 1990s, they live in a situation that can best be described as an 'ethnic catastrophe'.

Contact with an industrial State has caused this disaster (and has been responsible for similar extreme problems all over the circumpolar north) but, in the case of the Northern Minorities, the consequences were increased tenfold by the incompetent, unthinking and often even criminal policy of the totalitarian State which held complete control over the situation for the last 70 years.

The Northern Minorities, of course, were not the only people to suffer from this policy for it affected the whole country, every man and woman, every social and ethnic group. Indeed, some groups may have suffered more than others, if it is possible to compare sufferings at all, but the problem of the Northern Minorities was that they were, and still are, extremely vulnerable because of their fragile environment, small numbers and because of certain cultural characteristics they possessed. This is why, although they were never an object of deliberate suppression, the situation they find themselves in today is so desperate.

In spite of this very difficult situation, the Northern Minorities still exist. They continue to live in their traditional territories; they still retain close bonds with their land; they still keep, at least in some places, their traditional cultures and languages and they still retain a right to be called human beings and to have human rights.

However, this report argues that individual human rights are insufficient in their case. They need group rights, special attention, special protection and very strong affirmative action policies.

Names and Numbers

Different sources give different lists of names for the Northern Minority groups. This unstable terminology reflects changes in knowledge so that, for example, during the 19th and early 20th Centuries, different 'external' names, chance names and nicknames were widely in use instead of the self-appellations which are now commonly, although not consistently, used.

Officially, 26 Northern Minorities are recognized but it is difficult to be exact since there are no reliable criteria to distinguish between a 'people', a 'tribe', an 'ethnos', and an 'ethnic group'. Linguistic criteria do not help either: it is impossible to distinguish between a language and a dialect when discussing a language with no written form.

Today, the accepted official nomenclature of the Northern Minorities, and of their languages, no longer matches the level of our knowledge. Groups that are described as one 'people' often live thousands of kilometres away from each other in completely different environments and, moreover, may not even know of each other's existence (Yukagirs are the most striking example). Also, they often speak languages that are not mutually understood. On the other hand, common self-appellations often help different groups to keep a common identity: this is true for the Evenks of south-east Yakutya and for different groups of Nenets.

Two other indigenous groups should be mentioned. The Yakuts and Komi are usually excluded from the list of Northern Minorities because they are much larger than the others, and also because they possess their own autonomous republics within Russia. However, they do share some characteristics with the 26 smaller groups.

As with the names of the different Northern Minorities, 19th Century data about numerical strength is reliable for very few tribes and should be referred to with caution. However, statistical sources, beginning with Patkanov's work in 1911 and using the very detailed analyses by anthropologists working at the Siberian Department of the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow,[2] do allow for a fairly accurate picture of the population dynamic during this period.

It was not until the census of 1926 that relatively sound statistical information could be found on the Northern Minorities. According to this document, the total 'Northern' population (those living in a vast area of over seven million sq. km.) was 124,625.[3]

By the 1959 census, the size of the Northern Minorities was 131,436 (about 0.1 per cent of the population of the ex-USSR). The 1989 census gives the total strength as 183,700 (0.06 per cent of the total population of the ex-USSR). (*See Table 2.*)

TABLE 2

NUMBERS OF NORTHERN MINORITIES ACCORDING TO THE CENSUSES OF 1926, 1959, 1989

	1926	*1959*	*1989*
Aleuts	3534	421	702
Chukchee	12332	11727	15184
Chuvans	705	–	1511
Dolgans	656	3934	6932
Entsy	482	–	209
Eskimos	1293	1118	1719
Evenks	38805	24710	30163
Evens	2044	8121	17199
Itel'mens	859	1109	2481
Kets	1428	1019	1113
Khants	17334	19410	22521
Koryaks	7439	6287	9242
Mansi	6095	6449	8461
Nanais	5860	8026	12023
Negidals	683	350	622
Nenets	16217	23007	34665
Nganasans	867	748	1278
Nivkhi	4076	3717	4673
Orochi	647	782	915
Oroks	162	–	190
Saami	1720	1792	1890
Sel'kups	1630	3768	3621
Tofalars	415	–	–
Udege	1357	1444	2011
Ul'chi	723	2055	3233
Yukagirs	443	442	1142

From: *Indigenous Peoples of the Soviet North*, IWGIA, Document 67, Copenhagen, 1990, p. 13; *Etnicheskoye razvitiye narodnostey Severa v Sovetskiy period*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1987, pp. 67, 101.

THE COMING OF THE RUSSIANS

'Siberia is sometimes regarded as a country originally peopled by political exiles and criminals.'

M. Czaplicka, 1914

There are few serious Soviet historical studies of the peoples classified as 'Northern Minorities', or of the area they inhabit. The material that does exist is largely pseudo-scholarly speculation outlining their supposed rapid and consistent development which allegedly began immediately after the October Revolution of 1917 and quickly brought them from a stone age environment to a technologically advanced and flourishing economic, social and cultural condition, in line with the rest of the country.

This perspective arbitrarily splits the history of the Northern Minorities into the same periods as Soviet history: the Revolution of 1917; the Collectivization of 1929–33; the Patriotic War of 1941–5 and so on.[4] However, in order to understand the contemporary situation of the native peoples of the North it is necessary to go much further back in time than 1917, and also to use very different criteria to outline the changes in their experience.

Without this longer historical viewpoint, it is not possible to see how they came to be in the catastrophic situation they are facing today, nor is it possible to explore constructive solutions which might enable them to find a new and more positive role.

Russian Colonization

Before the 16th Century, the native peoples of the far North had no contact with Europeans. It was only around the 1550s that the first fur traders and cossacks penetrated the area east of the Ural mountains which form a natural borderline between Europe and Asia. Russians, and others in the service of Russia, made a spectacular advance across Siberia from the Urals to the Pacific between 1580 and 1640 – a distance of 5,000 km. in 60 years. This conquest of north Asia was accomplished more by a process of infiltration than by military action[5] but nevertheless the whole process had great impact on the life and fate of the indigenous population.

By the 17th Century, the Russians knew, under various names, the ancestors of all the ethnic groups now living in the far north; by the end of the 18th Century, settlements of Russian peasants, hunters, sailors and merchants, located mostly along large rivers, were covering the vast territory, including the coast of Alaska.

The Russian annexations of the first 200 years did not lead to any noticeable decrease in the numbers of native peoples. The main goal of the central government, as well as of the local authorities and private merchants, was not to wipe out the tribespeople but to turn them into reliable suppliers of tribute, mostly in the form of furs. Trade with the Russians, however, greatly affected some traditional economies. From reindeer breeding, hunting and fishing many of the native peoples shifted gradually to fur hunting and trapping in order to exchange the furs for industrial goods at the trading stations. Others developed a much larger-scale reindeer-breeding economy which had not previously existed. (Reindeer were bred for meat, skins, fat and transport. Their skins were used for clothes and tents and their fat for heating, fuel for lamps and food.)[6]

In its encroachment on native peoples and their land, Russian colonialism therefore showed similarities to that in other parts of the world. Some native groups willingly became subjects of the Russian Empire, seeking protection from Russian military forces against their neighbours, while others opposed the intruders, either by abandoning their territories and moving away, or by armed resistance. Contrary to commonly accepted opinion within Russia, however, the Russians demonstrated racial prejudice and treated their subject peoples no more kindly than did other colonial powers.

Traditional tribal organization underwent deep changes during this period and many ancient social institutions were changed. In the 17th and 18th Centuries there were migrations and population shifts both within a single ethnic group and between several of them[7] but, as a rule, these migrations were not accompanied by military clashes.

The ethnographic map of Siberia therefore changed and became much more complex in the 400 years from the early period of Russian contact to the beginning of the 20th Century. Those areas occupied by tundra Nenets, Chukchee, Evenks and Evens grew noticeably, while Entsy, Yukagirs, Koryaks, Itel'mens and Eskimos lost much of their territory. In general, the groups who lived on fishing and hunting lost land, while nomadic reindeer breeders gained it.[8]

19th Century Administration

From the 17th to the 19th Centuries, administration of the native peoples was carried out by a system of governors, through local chiefs and elders. The responsibility of the elders included judicial, policing and fiscal functions, as well as collecting the fur tribute. In practice, the tribes were thrown upon the mercy of the Siberian administration which, even compared to that of European Russia, was notorious for its embezzlement of State property and for violence.[9]

During 1819–20, Mikhail Speransky, the closest adviser at that time to Emperor Alexander I and the author of the first liberal reform plan for Russia, devised the 'Code of Indigenous Administration'. The code, which became law in 1822, was, by the standards of its time, an exceptional legal document in which an attempt was made to protect by law the native population of the land that was being colonized and to give those who were settled the same rights as Russian peasants. It also showed a sincere desire to preserve the native economy against Russian capitalism and to protect the original culture.

During the course of the 19th Century, numerous amendments were made to the code in attempts to improve it. Finally, in 1892, all these were amalgamated into the 'Statute of the Indigenous Peoples'[10] which remained in effect until the 1917 Revolution.

Unfortunately, though, the implementation of the law lagged far behind its adoption. In particular, the Government failed to limit the wave of Russian colonization by legal boundaries and Russians penetrated deeper and deeper into native territories, violating indigenous rights. Governmental officials had only limited knowledge of local conditions in the North and their honesty left much to be desired. Gradually, especially after Speransky retired, the protective measures receded and the administration took the side of the colonialists completely. Expropriations of indigenous land followed, often accompanied by violence and military clashes.

The law also failed to protect the minorities from exploitation by traders. For example, the fur merchants, who had real power in Siberia, often bartered with vodka for the goods offered by the indigenous peoples, and it was not long before the natives became addicted to alcohol and their impoverishment reached new depths.[11]

By the early 20th Century the situation in the North was relatively stable and the living conditions of most of the native peoples were generally hard. Although in theory they possessed various rights and privileges, in practice their actual rights were almost nil. Many therefore tried to preserve their way of life by escaping further to the north or east where there were no Russians: they would come out to the trading stations once or twice a year to exchange fur for powder, bullets, rifles, flour, salt, cloth, instruments, and then disappear again into remote tundra and taiga.

The poor conditions and general situation of the native peoples did, however, concern some of the Siberian intelligentsia who developed a school of thought called *Oblastnichestvo* ('Regionalism'), a political movement very popular in Siberia in the early 20th Century. The Regionalists supported Siberian self-government and the establishment of a Siberian regional parliament, arguing that it was impossible to implement a working system of representatives from the minorities in the State Parliament in Petersburg, at that time the capital of the Russian Empire. They therefore proposed the establishment of 'special territories', after the model of North American Indian or Australian Aboriginal reserves, where non-native settlements would be forbidden.[12] However, these ideas were not implemented.

NORTHERN MINORITIES: 1917–1930

The first decade after the Bolshevik Revolution was an important one for the Northern Minorities. They were still subject to the laws of a foreign government and a foreign ideology but while some scholars and officials attempted to protect them, others saw them as ignorant and inferior and their lands as rich resources for the State. Several of the ideas and plans formed on their behalf during this period are still relevant today.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917

Many new laws were passed after the 1917 October Revolution when the Bolshevik Party, under Lenin's leadership, seized power. Some of these concerned the Northern Minorities and the most important of all from their point of view was passed in November 1917. Called the 'Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia', it proclaimed the inalienable right for the 'free development of ethnic minorities and ethnographic groups that live within the territory of Russia'.[13] The 1918 Constitution also guaranteed 'equal rights to all the citizens, irrespective of their racial or ethnic affiliation'.[14]

During the Civil War (1918–23), Soviet power in the North was consolidated although the new government paid little attention to the native peoples. 'Soviets' (councils) were formed but in many areas the native population did not understand their function and, not without reason, saw them as a threat to their welfare.

By 1923, the dominance of the Soviet authorities was complete in most parts of the North. The former native administrative structures, together with all the organs of the former Tsarist administration, had been dismissed and the 'Statute of the Indigenous Peoples' had been abrogated.

The Committee of the North

After the 1917 Revolution, a special ministry called 'Narkomnatz' (People's Commissariat of Nationalities) was formed which was responsible for national affairs. Until 1924, it was Narkomnatz which functioned as an administrative body ostensibly responsible for Northern affairs but it had no local structures of its own and hence no real authority. This was eloquently expressed in a report by the Enisey Soviet in 1923:

> ***'The natives live by exploiting the zoological resources, while the Russians live by exploiting the natives... The native people of the North live beyond the Constitution of the Russian Republic.'***[15]

In April 1923, mainly as a result of the persistent and patient efforts of Professor Vladimir Bogoraz, a distinguished anthropologist who had spent a decade in exile

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among the Northern Minorities. Narkomnatz recommended that a new body be established with the primary aim of helping the indigenous peoples towards equal rights. Thus, on 20 June 1924, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee (the supreme governmental body of the USSR before 1936) voted to establish the 'Committee for Assisting the Peoples of the Far North', better known as the 'Committee of the North'. Its purpose was to 'define and to reserve the territories necessary for the life and cultural development of each ethnic group'.

The Committee of the North consisted of high-ranking government officials and scholars with the following organizational, planning and research functions:

- To investigate, develop and implement the measures necessary for economic progress in the region.
- To study the history, culture and everyday life of the Northern Minorities and to collect information about their needs.
- To investigate measures necessary to guard them against exploitation.
- To define the basic principles of an administrative and judicial system in the area.

In practice, the achievements of the Committee of the North were more modest because of insufficient funding and its work was eventually curtailed because of the growing power of totalitarian Communism. Nevertheless, it was made up of exceptionally knowledgeable and enthusiastic scholars who had an enormous influence on every aspect of the economic, cultural and social life in the North. Its journal, *Severnaya Asia*, contained brilliant studies of the lifestyle of the Northern Minorities.

Conservatives and Radicals

For the first ten years after the formation of the Committee of the North, all discussions about the social and legal status of the indigenous peoples concentrated, at first covertly and later quite openly, around the struggle between two main schools of thought which can be designated 'conservative' and 'radical'.[16]

The Conservatives had as their basic aim to protect the culture and way of life of the Northern Minorities from outside interference. This position was the essentially ethnographic and philanthropic view of many members of the Committee. However, the Radicals put class above nationality and had as their ultimate aim the elimination of ethnic distinctions and eventually the merging of all the ethnic groups in one 'Soviet people'. This was the official view of the ruling Communist Party.[17]

The main issue of controversy was the status of the territories populated by the Northern Minorities. Since the Conservative position was based primarily on a humanistic and respectful attitude towards the peoples and cultures of the Northern Minorities, it advocated their slow and gradual inclusion into the economic and social life of the rest of the country.

To achieve this, the Conservatives put forward a plan (similar to that of the Regionalists) that certain 'reserved' lands should be established on the same principle as the American Indian reserves.[18] These would be controlled by the central government but the traditional life of the Northern Minorities would be able to be sustained. At the same time, there was to be a ban on new settlers, both Russian and those belonging to other indigenous tribes, since the merging of the Russian and aboriginal population 'means death for the indigenous people'.[19] The territories were to be protected by special laws, such as a prohibition on sales of alcohol, restrictions on private trade, the organization of schools and medical services and allowances in the form of clothing and food. Education was to link closely to traditional life and activities. 'Nomadic' schools were proposed and teachers were to be recruited and trained from the tribes themselves.[20]

The Radicals, on the other hand, claimed that the supposed differences between the Northern Minorities and the majority population were not factually based and so their road to social progress should be similar to that of the country as a whole. Generally, the main objective of their 'Northern offensive' was to discover and exploit the natural and mineral resources of the area: timber, gold and, later, oil and gas. The aboriginal population was seen only as a means to this end and in fact were often considered to be 'savages', culturally inferior to the Russians. At the same time, the Radicals recognized that it was necessary to supply food to the minority peoples since they would not otherwise service, nor be able to help, the Russians to colonize the region. This position was formulated quite bluntly and explicitly in an article in 1925: 'all other problems of Northern Asia are inevitably subordinate, in some way or other, to the possibility of future industrial development.'[21]

At the beginning of its existence, the Committee of the North followed the Conservative position. This was only possible while the new Communist power was still weak and while it reluctantly tolerated those who advocated a cautious and gradual development policy for the North. However, in line with changes elsewhere in the USSR, the position of the Radicals had become stronger by the end of the 1920s. They urged an end to 'fussing over' the Northern Minorities, denied the necessity for 'special conditions' for their development and demanded immediate collectivization as well as a ruthless campaign against the *kulaks* (rich peasants) and shamans.

The Conservatives quickly retreated. They became resigned to the 'necessity' of Northern industrial development, mainly through imported labour from elsewhere in the USSR, but they still called for a parallel traditional economy for the indigenous peoples. They also advocated special protective measures and for controls over the incoming stream of settlers in order to help the native population to 'reach the cultural level of the Russian population'.[22]

By 1929, the Conservatives had lost their previous influence on the Committee of the North. This was reflected in the change of tone of the articles in *Severnaya Asia* which became more like Party slogans and less like academic research. They dealt almost exclusively with economic problems and the Northern Minorities were not mentioned. After 1931, *Severnaya Asia* ceased to exist.

Formation of Tribal Soviets

Constantly increasing pressure from the Communist Party leadership forced legislators to make desperate attempts to reconcile those models of land-tenure, administration and economy which they thought proper for the Northern Minority areas with Party directives, Stalin's orders, Party Congress decisions and instructions from the ministries. It became ever more apparent that the ideals of the Conservatives and Radicals not only contradicted each other but were irreconcilable in principle: self-administration by small ethnic groups on the basis of common law and traditional culture could not co-exist with a centralized totalitarian system of power. Thus, laws concerning administration in the Northern Minority areas became more ambiguous and compromising.

The 'Temporary Statute of Native Administration in the North of the USSR' and the 'Temporary Statute of Organization of the Court System in the North of the USSR' are examples of such laws.[24] According to their authors, the primary goal of these statutes was to allot rights of ownership and administration over a given area to the tribe(s) which had traditionally occupied it and, consequently, to secure the borders and solve territorial disputes both between tribes and, more importantly, between the indigenous population and the incoming settlers.

Administrative functions were handed over to organs of native administration:

1. The **Tribal Assembly** comprised all the adult members of the tribe who lived together in a given area. It met at least once a year with functions including elections to higher bodies and decision-making on issues of land usage, taxation and tribute, food supplies and so on.
2. The **Tribal Soviet**, the local administrative body, was elected for one year and consisted of three people. It had executive power over the tribal territory and judicial rights over the court cases within the tribe and with neighbouring tribes. These cases dealt with such issues as marriage and family, inheritance, property and land usage issues.
3. The **Raion Congress** was a territory's supreme administrative body and consisted of from 10 to 30 members depending on the number of Soviets contributing delegates. It approved and distributed the regional budget and other issues and was elected by several tribes living in a designated area.
4. The **Raion Aboriginal Executive Committee** consisted of three people. It had executive power within the region and also the right to handle most criminal cases.

These administrative bodies were to maintain the traditions and customs of the tribe as long as they did not overtly contradict the laws of the country. However, the higher (third grade) court (the People's Court of the Russian Federation) was the same as that for the whole population. At the same time, a class qualification which obviously conflicted with traditional models of administration was also introduced by statute so that rich reindeer owners, trade middlemen and shamans could not be elected.

The number of Soviets in the North grew rapidly. In 1925–6 there were 201, in 1927–8, 352 and in 1929–30, 455. In many areas the local administration, unable to find 'tribes' within their territory, hastily created them. For example, Penzhinsky Raion Executive Committee created a Mikin Koryak tribe that had not previously existed while five Koryak and two Even 'tribes' were created by a decision of Kamchatka Revolutionary Committee.[25]

However, the drawbacks of the Tribal Soviet system were already clear by 1927. The main issue was that in many areas there was no connection whatever between blood relations and territory. Members of one tribe travelled with deer in different regions; members of different tribes and often different minorities lived together in the same villages. In practice, the Tribal Soviets were formed in accordance with the territorial principle but in many ways it was difficult to tell the difference between this system and the traditional structures of aboriginal self-administration that had functioned before 1917 under the 1892 Statute of the Indigenous Peoples.[26]

In many areas, the Tribal Soviets existed only in administrative theory. A representative of the Committee of the North reported in 1925 from Turukhan Krai: 'I have seen no work done by the Soviets. The Soviets are completely passive.' From Kamchatka, at the other end of the vast Northern territories, the reports were similar: 'The Tribal Soviets exist only on paper and do nothing because of their illiteracy and backwardness.'[27]

As a rule, the Northern Minorities did not oppose the establishment of Tribal Soviets; most were generally indifferent to them. In some places, though, the native population was suspicious of all that originated from the Russians: Soviet power was seen as Russian power. The Synya Khants, for example, expressed their opposition to a Tribal Soviet thus:

> ***'If there is a Tribal Soviet in the Synya river area, we, the natives, will have nowhere to live. Schools and medical institutions will grow gradually around the Executive Committee, the natives will be taught, drafted to the army; trading stations will be established. Russians will come to the Synya river and settle down, steamboats will come into the river. We don't like this, and we don't want this.'***[28]

The Northern Economy

During the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War, the old economic ties were broken and the traditional supply routes to the region were blocked. By 1922, tribespeoples found themselves in a perilous situation: imports (guns, powder, instruments, food, cloth) were nonexistent, the

yearly fairs were no longer organized, trade between the reindeer breeders and the settlers ceased. In many areas, hunting rifles were confiscated by the new administration for fear of 'aboriginal riots'.

In 1919–20, a massive loss of deer occurred. In their revolutionary zeal, the new rulers often confiscated furs and riding deer from those whom they considered 'too rich'. The allotted number of deer was calculated by the same standards as those used for horses and cows in a European Russian household, where four animals were considered excessive, while a Nenets household, for example, had to possess at least 250 deer in order to avoid starvation. As a result, in the rich Turukhan tundra the indigenous peoples began to starve.[30]

The economic situation eased somewhat in the early 1920s when both private and State trade resumed supplies to the North. Flour, dried bread, salt, powder and textiles were imported in exchange for furs, fish and meat. The Government raised the price of furs while the price of State-imported goods was lowered: this process was used as the main instrument for development of the Northern market. Between 1924 and 1929, furs, together with grain and oil, headed Soviet exports. The Government used the resulting foreign currency receipts to buy equipment for heavy industry, hence it had a vested interest in the Northern Minorities keeping their traditional occupation.[31]

At first, private trade was licensed in areas where there was no State or cooperative trade but, by 1929, it was completely banned. In 1924, a law was passed according to which the State took the responsibility to allocate special funds for supplying goods to the Northern areas. In 1927–8, this budget totalled 16.8 million roubles, in 1929–30, 27.5 million roubles.[32]

The first consumer cooperatives and hunting and fishing cooperatives were organized in the early 1920s. In 1927, integrated cooperation was introduced which combined production, consumption, supplies, marketing, credit and trade. This economic form was popular and profitable and had tax privileges. By 1930, integrated cooperation already covered up to 35 per cent of the economically active population of the North.

In 1925, the Central Executive Committee released the Northern Minorities from all taxes. In 1929, the Council of Ministers released them from military service, and this directive was maintained until 1936.

Education and Language

The Committee of the North promoted a three-pronged education initiative. The first strand was the so-called Northern 'culture bases', complex institutions which combined economic, educational, medical, veterinary and research activities, and which were established in 1925.[33] By 1931, eight culture bases had been founded: East (First), Second and Third Tungusic; Nenets; Chukotkan; Sakhalin; Ostyak; Koryak.[34]

The second strand was the school system. In 1925, there were already 41 schools in the Kamchatkan area (which then included the present territories of Kamchatka and Chukotka) with around 2,000 students. By 1930–1 there were 123 schools, including 62 boarding schools, which housed about 3,000 students, or 20 per cent of all Northern children of school age.[35]

The first teachers were Russian so they had to learn the basics of the minority languages before they could start teaching. Russian, reading, writing and simple arithmetic were the first subjects. Given the high illiteracy rate and lack of knowledge of Russian, teacher training was a major priority. From 1926 onwards, teachers for the Northern schools were trained in institutes in several cities: Tobolsk, Khabarovsk, Archangel, Tomsk and Leningrad (in 1930, the latter was reorganized into the famous Institute of the Peoples of the North).[36]

The third strand was the development and alphabetization of Northern Minority languages. In 1930, a group of scholars who organized the Scholarly Association of Northern Research in Leningrad developed the Unified Northern Alphabet, based on the Roman alphabet, and work began on developing writing systems for the Northern Minority languages. By 1931, 13 peoples had received alphabets and three primers had been published.

It was a difficult task to create writing systems for all 26 languages and, in an attempt to work quickly, the languages were grouped into clusters. One basic language was chosen in each according to the number of speakers, linguistic features and its economic importance. Then writing systems were created for these basic languages.

Related groups of people could either adapt the basic language writing systems to meet the needs of their own language, or else switch gradually to the basic language in its pure form. For example, in the far east, the number of writing systems was reduced to five basic languages (Evenk, Nanai, Ul'chi, Nivkh, Chukchee) and four isolates (Eskimo, Itel'men, Aleut, and Ainu) ignoring Even, Orok, Orochi, Koryak and others.[37]

Although it was difficult to avoid at the time, the language groupings had an adverse effect on the development of literacy. For instance, Yukagir and Ket were not on the list at all and even today do not have standard writing systems. More importantly, within each group, and even within some of the 'isolates', there are several languages, of which some differ too greatly to use the same writing system.

Recommendations made by the Committee of the North for the school curriculum were discussed and adopted in 1925. The central principle was that the Northern Minorities should stay within their traditional territories, following their traditional trades and way of life. The school timetable was to run in accordance with local customs and seasonal economic activity.

The first grade (aged 10–14) included primary school courses to be taught first in the students' mother-tongue and later in Russian. The second grade (aged 13–17) was designed to give the gifted an opportunity for further education. The most talented could then continue their education at the same school after the age of 17 in order to be trained as teachers, veterinaries or doctor's assistants.[38]

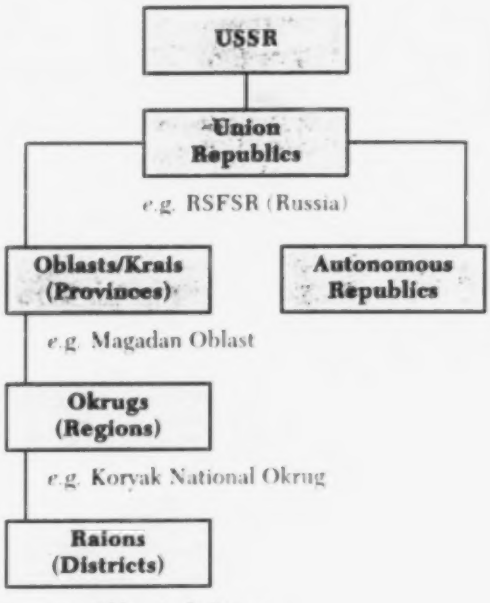
In spite of difficult living and working conditions, the first

teachers accomplished a great deal. For example, in 1928, there were no literate people in the Eskimo village of Sireniki in southern Chukotka but, by the spring of 1930, about 20 adults could read and write and 42 schoolchildren attended classes.

At the same time, the first modest attempts were made to teach native languages at local schools. In Leningrad, the educational publishing house, Uchpedgiz, published primers and readers. However, given that only a few Russian scholars had even a moderate knowledge of Siberian languages, it was difficult to sustain publications on a regular basis.

In 1937, a new alphabet based on Cyrillic was introduced 'to facilitate learning'. This was done for political reasons by government decree but without any consultation with scholars or others with practical experience. Many scholars who worked on the Northern alphabet in 1930 were arrested as 'enemies of the people' and were reviled by the Government media.[39]

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES OF THE FORMER USSR



Adapted from Hosking, G., *A History of the Soviet Union*

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND COLLECTIVIZATION: 1930–1941

'Even a cursory glance at history should convince one that individual crimes committed for selfish motives play a quite insignificant role in the human tragedy compared with the numbers massacred in unselfish love of one's tribe, nation, dynasty, church or ideology.'

Arthur Koestler, *The Urge To Self-Destruction*

During the 1930s the Northern Minorities shared the tragic fate of the rest of the country but the consequences of Communist rule were much worse for them than for most of the population of the USSR. As small societies living in a fragile environment, they had evolved a lifestyle in keeping with their hostile surroundings. Yet, in only ten years, the way of life and balanced economy which they had developed over centuries was largely destroyed.

National Okrugs

National Okrugs were autonomous administrative and territorial units set up along ethnic lines by the Soviets according to a plan put forward by the Committee of the North. They can be interpreted as the Committee's last attempt to find a compromise between the need to protect the indigenous peoples and the inevitable offensive of industrial development in the North, and their aim was 'to establish new and rational economic boundaries that would not contradict the ethnic boundaries'.[40]

The Committee of the North suggested two alternative models: National Raions and National Okrugs. National Raions, which were already in existence, implied a more direct line of subordination to the regional authority (the Oblast). Thus, the line of control began at the level of the local Soviet, then moved up to the Raion and then up to the Oblast, which was the largest administrative unit within a Republic. A National Okrug, on the other hand, could be positioned between a Raion and an Oblast and allow a supposedly greater level of autonomy for those under its jurisdiction. Eventually, a combination of the two was accepted: in some areas Raions were directly subordinate to Oblasts while in others Okrugs were set up between them.

In 1929 the Nenets National Okrug was the first to be established. In 1930 the majority were formed, namely, in eastern Siberia five National Okrugs and one National Raion; in the far north-east, three National Okrugs and two National Raions; in Yakutiya, five National Raions. By 1932 a further nine National Okrugs had been formed, covering 38 Raions, along with 20 National Raions in other areas.[41]

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In December 1930, the Committee of the North proclaimed that, with the formation of National Okrugs, the content of its work should change so that instead of representing the Northern Minorities in non-native administrative units, its primary objective should now be to represent the whole catchment area of National Okrugs and National Raions irrespective of their ethnic affiliation.[42] Unfortunately, under highly centralized Communist Party rule, these good intentions could not be realized because contradictions between the social organization, customs and traditions of the indigenous population and the Communist theories and slogans of 'class struggle' were too deep, the strengths of the Conservatives and Radicals too unequal. The gap between the interests of the minorities and of large-scale industry proved irreconcilable in a totalitarian state.

The result was that government decrees that local aboriginal administrations should be funded on an equal basis with the local Russian Soviets were ignored, as were orders to allocate funds to local representatives of the Committee of the North for educational and medical development, to complete the building of cultural bases, and so on.[43] Contrary to Government orders, local administrations taxed the Northern Minorities in the same way as the rest of the population[44] and there were continuous reports of multiple violations of the law, both by unauthorized Russian settlers and by State institutions and enterprises.

Industrial Development

The 1930s marked the beginning of an enormous industrialization programme throughout the USSR and, in particular, in the North. Not only were the Northern Minorities not given back land appropriated before the Revolution, as the law prescribed, but new land was forcefully taken away from them by State-run industries which moved on to native land and ousted native peoples all over the North.

In many cases, the industrial enterprises behaved like a victorious army in an occupied town. For example, the entire Obdor Raion (in Tobolsk Oblast) was allotted monopoly rights to a fishing trust and, as a result, members of the local fishing cooperatives were forced to sign a contract which reduced their function of supplying labour to the trust.

It was logical that those State industries which supplied their workers with food preferred to rely mainly on their own agricultural State farms and imported labour. These State farms heavily exploited the natural resources which formed the basis of the traditional native economy so that the State deer-breeding farms arbitrarily used any pastures they wished without the slightest hesitation. The State fishing farms blocked rivers with fishing nets, breaking all the rules and violating the seasonal fishing periods, thus depriving the indigenous people of their traditional food.[45]

The Northern Minorities were not involved with the modern industrial sector since the latter relied largely on imported labour. At the same time, Russian settlers, who occupied the same territory as the indigenous peoples, were beyond the jurisdiction of the native courts.[46]

Since government supplies were insufficient and inappropriate, native hunters could not find what they needed at the trading stations and so often refused to sell their furs. Several cases were reported where the Fur Syndicate was unable to collect enough furs and so it alerted the Ministry of Foreign Trade. The latter then ordered alcohol to be set out for sale in the areas populated by the Northern Minorities. This was contrary both to many attempts of the Supreme Executive Committee in Moscow to outlaw alcohol in the North (for example in 1929 and 1930) and to those of the Committee of the North, which was neither informed nor even consulted.[47]

In this way, throughout the 1930s, real power in the North started to leak away from the local administration and the Committee of the North to the mighty, central, industrial ministries, to giants like 'Glavsevmorput' (Central Agency for the Northern Passage) and later to 'Dal'stroy' (Chief Administration for the Development of the Far North). The latter had a whole GULAG system under its jurisdiction and was using labour camp prisoners as manpower.

In 1938, Dal'stroy was placed under the command of the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) and began extensive timber exploitation and gold mining, first in the Upper Kolyma area and later all over the Magadan Oblast and Yakutiya. Dal'stroy activities greatly affected the Northern Minorities, particularly the western Chukchees and the Evens who, after collectivization, were turned into mere food and transport suppliers for Dal'stroy. Many groups of Chukchee and Even fled into inaccessible parts of the tundra and taiga in order to escape from Dal'stroy and from collectivization and, in this way, some managed to avoid collectivization until the mid-1950s.[48]

Collectivization

Forced collectivization in the USSR began in 1929 with the 'intensification of the rural class struggle'. Mass purges of those peasants who owned at least modest private farms followed. Land, animals and buildings were all seized from their owners and 'collectivized' (became the property of the State). Collectivization led to a rapid impoverishment of the country and, in many areas, mass opposition and repression.

Before 1930, despite the efforts of the Communist administration, no 'class struggle' could be organized in the North because the native population simply could not understand the meaning of the term.[49] For example, when a group of shamans and rich deer owners in a village in Kazym Raion were not allowed to attend the village assembly by the Party commissars, the whole assembly simply left.[50]

In spite of the numerous attempts of the Committee of the North, first to oppose collectivization and later to delay it and soften its impact, the campaign did finally reach the northern regions.[51] At first, though, the rate of collectivization was much lower than in the country as a whole, probably because of the remoteness of the region but possibly also because of the resistance of the Committee of the North. By 1931, for example, only 12

per cent of the natives were members of the *kolkhozy* (collective farms).

However, this state of affairs was not satisfactory to Communist Party officials and in 1934 collectivization was accelerated. At the beginning of that year about 12 per cent of deer herds were in collective ownership. By 1936, the figure had risen to 50 per cent and, by 1943, to 89.2 per cent.[32]

It was impossible to oppose the process; suicidal to protest. For example, in 1930–2 a wave of armed uprisings, in effect small civil wars against forced collectivization, swept the Samoyed North and Taymyr Peninsula but the rebels were ruthlessly suppressed and purged.

Population Movements

Between 1917 and 1926, the incomer population of the North grew between 5 per cent and 8 per cent per annum but between 1926 and 1935 the growth was 15-20 per cent. The proportion of the native population in National Okrugs decreased from 56 per cent in 1926 to 35 per cent in 1935.[33] In 1926, the Northern Minorities constituted 20 per cent of the total northern population; by 1937 their proportion was estimated at a mere 7 per cent.

The actual effects of this increase in the non-native population can be seen by looking at specific population groups. For example, in 1926 the total population of the Chukotka National Okrug was 14,931, of which 13,946 were native (93.4 per cent). By 1937, the total population had reached 35,000, of which the native population was 16,500 (47 per cent). This, however, was modest compared to Kamchatka Oblast where in 1926 the total population was 9,684, with a native population of 1,456 (15 per cent). By 1937, the total population had increased to 75,000 with a native population of only 1,800 (2.4 per cent).

In 1931, the Committee of the North had decided that 'alienation of the land of working land-users is possible only in special cases of great State necessity, and only then after special permission has been granted by the Oblast Executive Committee, with full compensation'.[34] Yet there was no consultation and no compensation. Even the massive forced relocation of the wealthy peasants from European Russia to Siberia, which was carried out as part of Stalin's collectivization campaign in 1929–32, was done without consultations with the local administrations.[35]

One of the consequences of this large-scale influx of people was a differential treatment between the native population and the incomers, expressed in a 1932 law. This latter divided the whole northern population into two categories. The first were professional (higher and middle administration officers, highly qualified specialists, judges, attorneys, police inspectors, solicitors) who received a 10 per cent yearly increase of salary, a 50 per cent reduction in taxes, privileges in allocation of apartments, university entrance and so on. Those of the Northern Minorities who belonged to this category also received these benefits but they were very few in number.

The remainder of the population fell into the second category. This group could enjoy these privileges only if they came as workers to the North from other areas of the USSR, which automatically excluded the vast majority of the native population and created two categories of payment for the same work. For example, two carpenters, a Russian and a Chukchee, who worked together in the same team, would receive different payments. This was the germ of the ugly situation that still exists today throughout the North: the difference in wages for the same work can reach three times and more.

The End of Opposition

In 1934, four years after *Severnaya Asia* was closed, its successor *Sovetskiy Sever* also ceased to exist. In the replacement journal, *Sovetskaya Arktika*, the tone of publications differed drastically. From 1937 onwards, *Sovetskaya Arktika* did not publish a single serious article on the economic, political or cultural situation of the Northern Minorities, nor make any references to the rights they might possess. Instead, it was an organ of Communist Party propaganda, filled with statements about the 'backwardness of nomadic tribes' and the need for 'radical socialistic reformation'.

Although the opposition could not publish their views, nevertheless there were brave people who openly protested, such as B.V. Lavrov, the former chairman of the Northern Passage Committee, whose speech in May 1937 sharply criticized the activities of the newly formed Glavsevmorput.

Not only individuals but also the Soviet Government itself was not able effectively to oppose the Communist Party apparatus embodied in the industrial trusts and their Party committees. The Supreme Executive Committee and the Council of Ministers in Moscow passed an act in August 1933 called 'On Nomadic Soviets in National Okrugs and Northern areas of Russian Federation'. Next, in October 1933, a similar act was passed that regulated the work of the courts. The intention was, on the one hand, to provide protection for the Northern Minorities against industrial expansion, thus giving them at least some independence from the economic administration and, on the other, to speed the collectivization process. However, while the second goal was achieved, the act proved ineffective against the industrial giants.

Finally, in 1935, the Committee of the North was itself abolished. For years its ethnographers, linguists and administrators had been fighting a losing battle on behalf of the Northern Minorities. Now, as the whole country slid into massive political and cultural repression and economic upheaval, their opposition was no longer possible.

THE DARK YEARS: 1941–1985

'And then someone obedient and timid
settled down in our souls,
someone who got accustomed
to being shouted at,
someone who would just humbly beg...'

Vyachslav Ankhaki, a Kamchatkan native.

The greatest pressures on the Northern Minorities came between 1950 and the mid-1980s. Soviet influence on them was institutionalized and became inescapable; they could only watch helplessly at the heartless amalgamation of their communities and the multitude of social problems which resulted. Given the power of the State, protest was virtually impossible.

Russification

During the Second World War, the Northern Minorities were protected from military conscription by a special act. Nevertheless, many of them volunteered and went to the front lines where many were killed and several decorated as military heroes. The country suffered heavy losses and severe damage during the war and, for the following five years, the Government in Moscow could give little thought to the Northern Minorities. By 1950, however, it once again turned its attention to the North.

By this time, a general ideological shift was under way. While in the 1920s-30s the official Communist ideology embraced the concept of 'class struggle' and regarded national and ethnic identification as obsolete, by 1945 Stalin's political course had changed sharply. Russian superiority in the sciences, industry and the arts was proclaimed by official propaganda. Arrests and purges which two decades previously had been carried out under the banner of the 'class struggle' were once again effected, but this time against the 'loss of national pride', 'cringing to the West' and 'cosmopolitanism'.

Russia was proclaimed first among the 128 'equal' nations of the USSR while its 'junior brothers' (Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Georgia and the other nations and ethnic groups) were supposed to live in peace with Russia and emulate it. On the other hand, the 'criminal peoples' (Ingush, Crimean Tatars, Chechens and so on) were to be punished by the State for 'treachery' or 'bad behaviour'.

This new governmental ethnic policy was based on the concept (although not yet the term) of the 'new historic unity, the Soviet people', a monolithic unity which was to form very quickly around the central core of the Russians. The 'international language of the Soviet people' was declared to be Russian and given top priority in all school timetables. The population of the USSR was supposed to suppress all its ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences and merge into a homogeneous mass of the Soviet people.

The Russification policy was supported by the dramatic changes in the legal code in the pre-war years. In 1936, soon after the Committee of the North was abolished, the system of integral cooperation in the North was dismantled. In the new constitution of that year there was no concept of National Raions; these were gradually dissolved over the following three decades. Some National Okrugs were also eliminated and, in 1938, the whole Arctic region was divided between the central ministries so that no central body existed to control the colonization of the North. Thus, the Northern Minorities lost all control over their own existence.

Chauvinism

A campaign called 'Nativization' was pursued for several years in which lower- and middle-grade positions in the local Communist Party and the Soviet administration were given only to members of the Northern Minorities. However, since they were appointed because of their ethnic background and not for their professional skills, many of them proved unable to fulfil the requirements of the administrative posts. So the pendulum swung to the other extreme and the natives were declared incapable of doing responsible work, thus fuelling outbursts of Russian chauvinism against the indigenous peoples which are still common in the North today. (In this context, and in many others, the word 'Russian' is used to designate any incomer irrespective of his or her real ethnic identity. About 20 per cent of the incoming population of the North are, in fact, Ukrainians, Armenians, Tatars and other peoples.)

Parallel to Russian chauvinism are similar outbursts by Yakut, Komi and Buryat people towards the smaller Northern Minorities. For example, motiveless beatings of the natives by the Russian incomers took place in Dudinka in the mid-1980s.[58] A Yukagir student told the author in 1987 that she had had to leave Yakutsk University because of constant insults from Yakut students, who felt that only the Yakuts should study there.

Multiple cases were reported in many Raion registry offices where the clerks refused to register new-born children under a native name on the grounds that 'such a name doesn't exist, it isn't a human name'. The remarks of a Russian librarian who had lived for several years in a Chukotkan village are typical:

'The Chukchee and the Eskimos? They live in the stone age!... They are all idlers! All they can do is have children, but they can't even take care of them. The State has to do that... Nurseries, kindergartens, boarding-schools, even the University... Everything free, of course... Hunting? They don't need it: they can buy everything they need in the village... Money? So long as they have enough to buy alcohol they are happy...'[59]

At the same time, those Russians who were born in the North or have lived there for 20 years or more, generally behave towards the natives with more respect and tolerance. For example, permanent Russian settlers in the Kolyma region are likely to speak Yakut and understand Even and Yukagir. Mixed marriages are not uncommon, and generally a person's ethnic identity is considered his own affair.

Yet, for the native peoples, bitterness runs deep. One Khant woman expressed her feelings:[60]

> ***'I wish I was dead, to avoid this earthly hell. What have I had children for – for this torture and disgrace? Let Russians be everywhere, then there will probably be Paradise. They will have nobody to destroy and ruin. They will have everything, they will raze to the ground the graves of our ancestors and our own, and that's it. Nobody will ever remember that there were once Khants, Mansi, and other useless nations.'***

Russian Language Policy

By 1950, the new settlers constituted about half of the total population of the National Okrugs. At this time, practically all the Northern Minority population could speak, or at least understand, Russian. In many ways, its acquisition as a second language was a positive development, as it allowed access to information via books, newspapers, radio and, later, television. However, Russification, and not bi-lingualism, was the real aim of the Government's policies.

In the Northern schools, the number of hours for native language teaching was reduced. In the areas where there were problems in teaching Northern Minority languages, such as in those with rich dialectal variety (Khant, Koryak, Nivkh), or those with an absence of alphabets (Yukagir, Ket, Naukan Eskimo, Aleut) or when the size of the group was small, all education in native languages ceased. Everywhere, Northern Minority languages became at best a subject of study instead of being the primary medium of instruction.

Around 1957, school teachers throughout the North began to exert pressure on the children with regard to their native languages. They were punished if they were heard to speak one other than Russian at school, and parents were requested not to speak their native language to their children at home. The usual explanation was that it would be better for the children to study only Russian at school since their education and understanding of the future mono-ethnic 'Soviet' State would be made easier.

This Russian language policy was never officially announced or published. However, it is interesting that Moscow's policies towards the Northern schools were very similar to those of the US Federal Administration towards Alaskan schools several decades earlier. Yet the difference is that the instructions of the Federal Administration were published and available for open discussion and criticism.

By 1970, out of the 26 languages in the North, only Nenets was used at school as a medium of instruction and, even there, only in primary schools. Chukchee, Eskimo, Khant, Mansi, Even and Evenk were taught as a subject of study; Sel'kup, Nivkh, Koryak and Nanai were no longer on the school timetable.[61]

The 'Broken Generation'

The degree of language competence of an individual and/or a community is closely correlated to the age of the speakers. The older generation is the bearer of linguistic and cultural tradition, a conservative group; the younger generation tends to switch to a language of a larger ethnos, in this case mainly Russian but sometimes other Siberian languages such as Yakut, Buryat or Komi.[62]

In many communities, a third group is present between the older and the younger generation. This group, usually between 30 and 50 years of age, is the 'broken generation'. It is characterized by 'group semi-lingualism' (where part of the group prefers Russian even though it does not yet have proficiency in it, while the other still prefers its native tongue, although it may have already lost proficiency). Normal communication within the group, as well as between the group and other generations, is therefore blocked.

From the cultural point of view, the 'broken generation' is also a hybrid: it has lost most of its traditional customs and values but has not yet acquired new ones; normal transmission of cultural values is also blocked.

If the transition takes several generations to complete, and is supported by a sound language and social policy, the group may even feel little frustration: after all, for a generation that speaks, as their mothers and grandmothers did, two languages, the loss of one of those may be a problem, but hardly a tragedy. However, in the North there has been a rapid ousting of Northern Minority languages by Russian, as well as the loss of bi-lingualism even before it was established. The children of the 1950s, who began or continued their education at the time when the Russification policy was launched, were particularly affected. This generation lost its language, its culture and sometimes also its identity, without receiving any viable substitute.

Forced Relocation

In the 1950s and 1960s another widespread campaign was launched in the North which was carried out with all the ruthlessness and incompetence of a totalitarian system and which had a catastrophic effect on the Northern Minorities. The campaign, of which the Russification process was only a forerunner, was based on the utopian ideal to bring the northern region, and the Northern Minorities in particular, to 'modern socialist civilization' as quickly as possible.

In March 1957, the Communist Party Central Committee issued a resolution, 'On the Measures for Further Economic and Cultural Development of the Peoples of the North'. The core of this was Article 5 which instructed

the Oblast, Okrug and Raion administration: to study the urgent problems of the further improvement of the economic and administrative territorial organization of National Raions and Okrugs... to consider the question of simplifying the structure and improving the work of the economic, Soviet and Party administration in the North."[53]

Improving and simplifying were understood by the local administrations as a call to bring the northern areas into line with the administrative structure of the rest of the USSR but what followed in practice was the shutting down of state and collective farms in smaller villages, together with the dismantling of local administrative bodies. At the same time, smaller villages were amalgamated into larger ones and the population was forcibly relocated.

Nomadic people were made to settle. Even the Khants, who were never really nomadic but migrated on a seasonal basis within a limited territory, had a regular war waged against them by the local administration. The state and collective farms were closed in their villages, leaving the population jobless; schools, hospitals and shops were shut; some villages were closed completely and the population moved to larger settlements.

An area with fewer villages and a unified economy is, of course, easier to administer but this form of organization was in direct contravention to the way of life of most of the Northern Minorities. For example, the traditional seasonal migrations of the Khants were economically suitable for a territory that could support only a limited number of hunters. Since the new settlements were chosen purely for their convenience for transportation, administration and centralized supplies, the native Khant population soon found itself with no means of support."[54]

In the settled areas, the local administration, pleading various reasons (supply routes, need for new roads and houses, the 'unprofitability' of small villages, military necessity) did their best to force the abandonment of small traditional villages of 30-50 inhabitants and move to new standard settlements of 600-800 people which had been built closer to Raion centres. The site for these new settlements were chosen according to European standards of convenience: close to a large river or safe bay, the lie of the land, ease of roadbuilding and so on. Convenience for traditional occupations, such as hunting, fishing and others, was not considered at all.

A good example is the amalgamation of Eskimo and Chukchee villages. Naukan lay on a steep slope south of the Bering Strait and was an ancient settlement where a branch of the Eskimo tribe had lived for centuries. In 1958, it was declared 'unprofitable' and the dwellers forced to move to the neighbouring villages of Nunyamo and Pinakul. The methods were simple: at first the local administration tried to persuade the inhabitants that they would be better off in the new villages but, when they did not succeed, the village school and the shop were shut down and, finally, the collective farm was liquidated, leaving the people unemployed. The Naukan Eskimos had no choice but to move.

After 19 years, Pinakul and Nunyamo were themselves amalgamated and the people transferred to the Chukchee villages of Lorino, Lavrentiya and Uelen where they formed only a small percentage of the population. Here, the Eskimo population decreased by 6 per cent; the Chukchee one increased by 7 per cent while the incoming (mainly Russian) population jumped by 116 per cent."[55]

Similarly, the Eskimos of south-eastern Chukotka who lived in the small villages of Unazik, Kivak, Avan, Siklyuk and others were transferred in 1958-9 to a new, large settlement, Novo-Chaplino, which had been built inside a deep bay. The traditional small villages were abandoned and soon ceased to exist. The new location made traditional sea-mammal hunting much more difficult since the settlement was built far away from the whale, walrus and seal migration routes. Thus, the traditional way of life and subsistence of these Eskimos changed completely within the lifetime of one generation and, in the new settlement, they constituted less than half of the population, the remainder being Chukchee and Russian.

The social and economic results of the Eskimos' enforced relocation were immediately evident: 'loss of meaning' was in turn followed by such social problems as unemployment, alcoholism and high suicide rates. In 1989 in Novo-Chaplino, there were 98 fully or partly unemployed men and women out of the total population of 534."[56]

During the 1950s and 1960s, there were six Saami villages in Lovozero Raion. In accordance with the relocation policy, they were amalgamated into one settlement but the process was slapdash and unprepared. The relocation was described by an onlooker:

> ***'I personally witnessed the relocation of the people from the village of Varzino. No houses had been prepared for them. People were put either into the houses of their relatives, or into slums no one needed. Three families of relatives, 11 people, moved into one small house. Imagine a two-room house with a kitchen where 16 people lived, not for one year, but for six years! And now they ask hypocritically why there is such a high crime rate among the Saami, why they drink so much!'***[57]

In 1960, the collective farms in Gornaya Shoria were closed down as unprofitable by a special decree of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation. This completely destroyed all organized economic activity in this rural area: the Shors became unemployed, since nothing was set up to take the place of the collective farms. Funding for house building also ceased. The Shor population had to abandon over 40 villages. Over two-thirds of the active population had to move to larger settlements and towns in search of jobs."[58]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the forced concentration of the Nivkh population took place on Sakhalin with such ruthlessness and incompetence that the tragic results are almost unprecedented in the North."[59] The natives were

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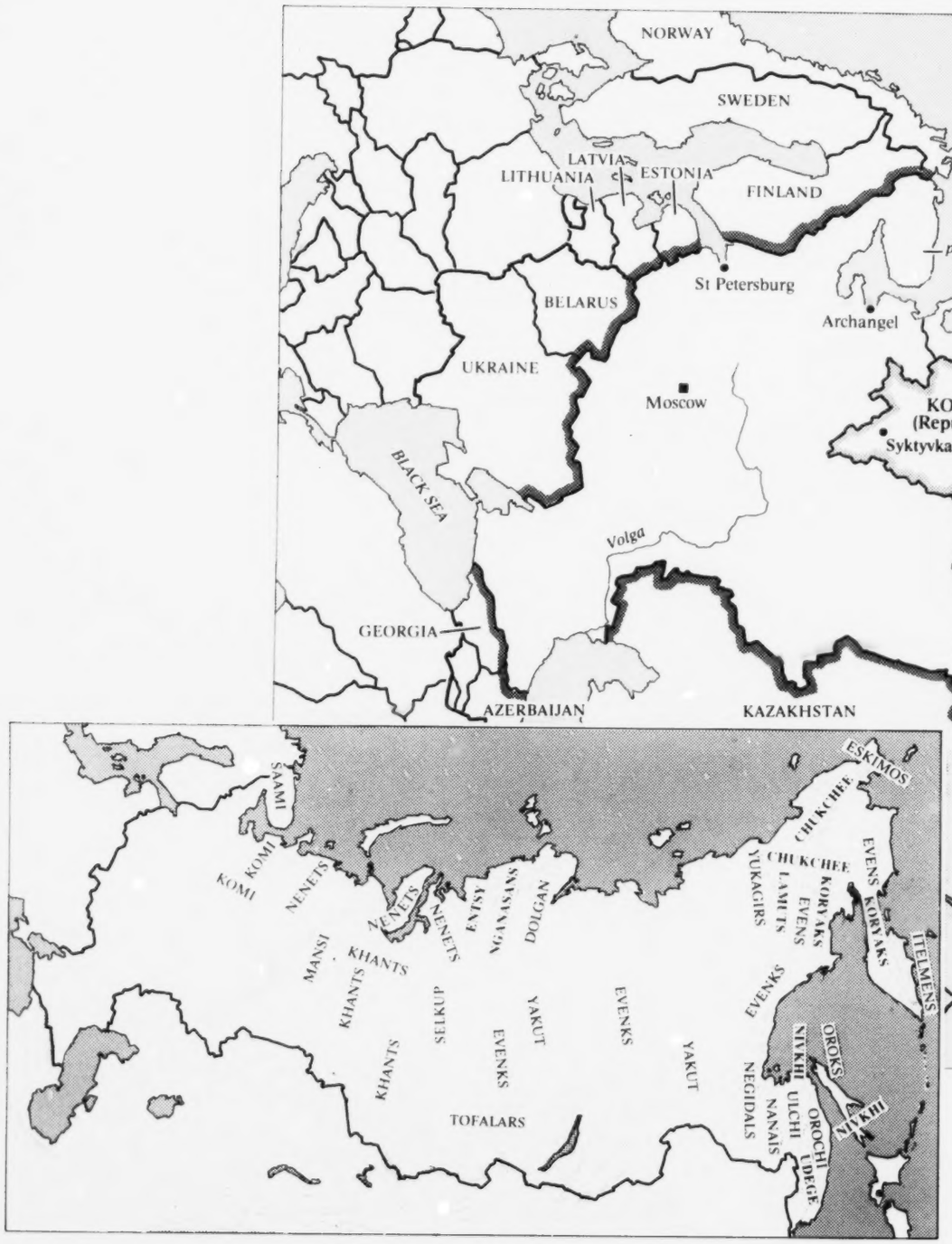
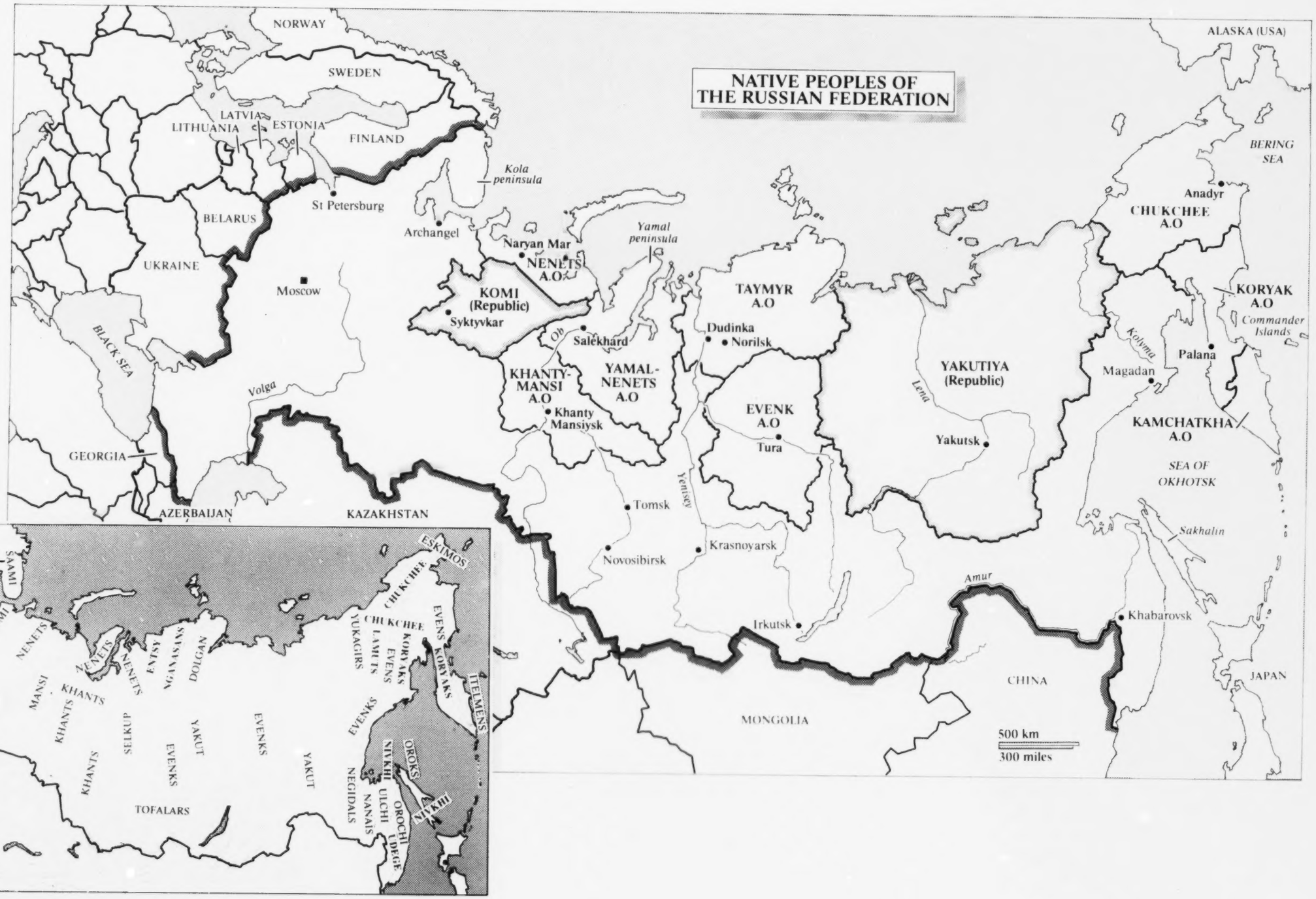
NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION





moved to two large settlements, Nogliki and Nekrasovka, which were located in places where traditional activity was out of the question. This soon caused unemployment, alcoholism and other related social problems.

The relocation and amalgamation policies were accompanied by pressures to end the traditional livelihood of the Northern Minorities. For example, for 15 years before 1987, the Eskimos of Chukotka frequently had difficulties in getting permission to hunt sea-mammals. The ban was supposed to be for reasons of state security (the international border was 19 kilometres away) and also, with unbelievable cynicism, out of apparent 'concern for the life and health of the hunters'. In the 1970s, the author witnessed pitiful scenes: the Eskimo sea-hunters, excellent sailors, consummate masters of whale and walrus hunt, had to ask for permission to hunt even for a couple of hours. Frequently, permission was refused.

In Tyumen Oblast in 1986–7, the Executive Committee banned all hunting except state commercial hunting, 'in order to oppose poaching'. This meant that the Khants could not carry on the activities which had always been the core of their culture. Anti-poaching laws were passed in many regions with no regard for the traditional ways of life of Northern Minorities. As a result, the natives could not hunt for the food they were accustomed to, which led to a drastic change in their diet and, consequently, to medical problems.[7]

Statistics

Even the published statistics prove beyond doubt that the Northern Minorities suffer from far worse conditions than the population of the USSR as a whole, or, for example, the native Indian population of North America. The average mortality rate in the Russian Federation in 1978–9 was 10.6 per 1,000, but in Magadan Oblast it was 12.7 per 1,000. Between 1979 and 1990 life expectancy in Magadan Oblast decreased by three years for men and two years for women, and is now respectively 42.5 and 50 years.[8] The average life expectancy of members of the Northern Minorities is between 40 and 45 years, about 16–18 years less than the average in the Russian Federation.

The suicide rate in the North is 80-90 per 100,000.[9] The incidence of tuberculosis is 42 per 100,000 for the USSR, 225 per 100,000 in Chukotka.[10] The percentage of children born outside marriage is also extremely high. For example, according to a survey conducted in 1979, out of 24 children born in Siremki in 1975–9 to Eskimo mothers under the age of 30, two-thirds were to unmarried mothers (for mothers under 24, the proportion was three-quarters). The proportion of single women between 21 and 30 was 76 per cent, of unmarried men, 53 per cent.[11] The high proportion of young unmarried mothers can partly be explained by traditionally more liberal sexual mores. However, to a large extent this is now due to the disintegration of traditional family and social structures and to the fact that a high proportion of the incoming population are unattached males.

Independent and reliable statistics were (and still are) hard to obtain. Scholars who tried to do field research involving statistics immediately got into trouble with the local KGB. Where such figures are available, the official statistics give a more optimistic picture than the reality. For example, the average life expectancy calculated by M. Volfson for the Northern Minorities in Chukotka was 44–5 years in the 1960s, and 40 years in the 1970s.[12] The published figures, however, gave 62 years as the average life expectancy of all the Northern Minorities in the 1960s.[13]

The Boarding-School System

Originally, boarding schools were designed to give children of nomadic groups an opportunity to obtain a systematic education. In the larger villages, special buildings were erected, equipment was imported, teachers were trained and the children of reindeer breeders and hunters began staying there nine months a year, thus having an opportunity to reach a similar standard of education to that of the non-nomadic peoples.

However, as part of the Russification policy, the system was later extended, firstly to cover the nomadic children of kindergarten and nursery age, and later to include children of the settled population. It soon became the only possible way to obtain school education and was made compulsory for all the children. This created an ugly situation whereby the parents had to 'turn in' their children at the age of one year, first to the nursery, then to kindergarten, then to boarding school for six days a week 24 hours a day, while themselves living in the same village.

As a result of the boarding-school system, children became fully State-dependent in many places and deprived of a family upbringing. They also lost their native mother-tongues. At the age of 15 or 17, they returned to their families as complete strangers, with no knowledge of traditional native culture or of home life. Parents also suffered since, in many cases, they lost all their feeling of responsibility towards their children and delegated it all to the State.

Eventually, the boarding-school policy led to dramatic changes in traditional social and family structure and contributed to the formation of the above-mentioned 'broken generation'. It led (and in many areas still leads) to the situation where the majority of the Northern boarding-school graduates completely lacks the necessary living skills, and often emerges without initiative and energy. The dominant psychological characteristic for many of them is apathy combined with aggression; they experience enormous stress when they begin their adult life.

The boarding schools are normally located in larger settlements and towns with children coming there from ethnically different villages. Most often, the only common language they have is Russian. The schools are thus a very effective means of destroying the Northern Minority languages: after eight or ten years of round-the-clock school training, the children cannot speak any language but Russian.

Two or three generations of Northern Minorities have already been taken through the boarding-school system and very few of them have been able to escape its

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destructive effects. In the last few years, however, the boarding schools have been gradually turned into ordinary day schools and the whole system is now being reconsidered. This is a positive development but, unfortunately, it will hardly repair the damage already caused.

The Autonomous Okrug Law

State policies concerning the Northern Minorities received a legal foundation in 1980 when the law on Autonomous Okrugs was passed.[77] Autonomous Okrugs replaced National Okrugs while National Raions were officially liquidated, although the latter had in fact been dwindling in numbers since the 1930s. All references to the Northern Minorities were removed from the text of the law and a more neutral term, 'autonomous', replaced the word 'national'.

Another change was that the Autonomous Okrug (as supreme administrative body) was elected by equal suffrage which meant the native peoples, who were by now a small minority everywhere, were effectively excluded from decision making. The establishment of Autonomous Okrugs completed the totalitarian pyramid of power. They were never regarded as a form of national/ethnic self-administration but were simply administrative units at a certain level: higher than Raions but lower than Oblasts. All matters concerning divisions within the Autonomous Okrugs and between Autonomous Okrugs and other units, also questions about the setting up or closing down of villages, towns, Raions and village Soviets, were, according to the law (Article 3), placed under the jurisdiction of the higher administration: the Oblast, Republic and, finally, the Union. Local Soviets now had a purely consultative role, and that was all.

Self-determination was no longer possible since economic and social planning (Article 7) became part of the respective Oblast or Krai responsibilities. The only right the local administration had over industrial enterprises functioning on their land was the right to be informed about their activities and to pass suggestions to higher levels of administration (Article 16).

Article 13 did appear to give the local Soviet some rights: the right to control whether the industrial enterprises kept the law; the right to coordinate and control their land-usage and to protect the environment, and so on. In fact, however, the Soviet had no means of implementing control and coordination. Even to establish or to close down an industrial enterprise of their own, the Autonomous Okrug had to ask for permission at a higher level (Article 16).

Given that Autonomous Okrugs replaced National Okrugs, it would be natural to expect special articles securing social, economic and cultural rights and providing for some kind of autonomy for the native peoples to be outlined in the law. However, Article 21, dealing with the agricultural and industrial rights of Autonomous Okrugs, says nothing about the traditional native occupations and system of subsistence. Article 28, regulating the rights of the Autonomous Okrug in education and science, does not mention the teaching of Northern Minority languages, culture and history in schools. The only mention of the indigenous peoples is a vague half-line in Article 29, that local Soviets should 'take measures to develop native culture, art and literature'.

The law was not accompanied by statutes on administrative territorial units which ought to have contained detailed descriptions of their legal basis and the ways they could be established or reorganized. Nor did it discuss border changes and land transfer issues.Thus, the population of the Northern areas could not enjoy effective legal security.[78]

In the same year as the Autonomous Okrug law, a Party decree was published: 'On the Measures for Further Economic and Social Development of the Areas Populated by the Peoples of the North.' The document seems to be concerned about the Northern Minorities since new funds were allocated to the North and new educational and social projects were launched. However, the (perhaps deliberate) ambiguity of the wording: 'Development of the Areas Populated by...', not 'Development of the Peoples of the North' made the decree useless in practice for the Northern Minorities. All the funds went directly to the Oblast and Raion authorities and were used to cover the needs of the whole population, of which the Northern Minorities constituted but a very small percentage. Needless to say, they had no influence on the distribution of funds.

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER: 1955 ONWARDS

The avalanche of industrial development hit the North in the mid-1950s, although attempts to industrialize it had already been made in the mid-1930s. In the following three decades, the area was not colonized but conquered, for it turned out to be extremely rich in timber, gold, coal, ore, oil, gas and other natural resources. However, there were laws neither for the geologists, nor for the road- or house-builders. A new mine or a new timber-cutting site could be started at any time, in any place, by a decision of the Moscow administration. Any parcel of land could be alienated from the native people by a stroke of the pen. Everything was explained and excused by the extraordinary State importance of the task which the 'pioneers' had to fulfil: gold for the State, oil for the State, and so on. Lyudmila S. Bogoslovskaya, a well-known expert on the Northern ecology and traditional subsistence models, stated that the State ownership of the land declared in the Constitution 'is a myth: what we really have is bureaucratic "departmental property", especially in the north'.[79]

The result was that the fragile ecological systems in the North, and the small ethnic groups of the Northern Minorities, were not able to withstand this industrial pressure, this 'permanent ecological aggression',[80] and it had an enormous effect on both the social and natural environment. The North's extraordinary vulnerability was seen, for example, in 1984 when it was calculated that, if one man in one caterpillar vehicle furrowed the Taymyr tundra eight hours a day for three summer months, he would succeed in turning the entire Taymyr Peninsula into a desert by the end of the century. The native population were unable to oppose these pressures because they had no legal structures they could use on their own behalf.

Timber

The first to attack the North were the timber concerns who were allocated taiga lots by the central government, without consulting or even informing the local administrations. A local Soviet would frequently learn that part of its territory had been given to a timber-cutting enterprise only when the employees arrived to prepare the trees for felling. For example, in December 1987 the hunters and reindeer breeders of an Evenk village called Tyanya (in Oklominsk Raion, Yakutiya) received an order to the effect that 450 sq. km. of taiga, amounting to five million cubic metres of trees, were to be alienated from their traditional hunting grounds. The document allotted to the native population a parcel of land only 20 x 40 km. for their own use. The village assembly sent delegates to the Raion Soviet, then to the administration of Yakutiya Republic, but nobody would listen to them. They were sent back rudely with the verdict: 'This is a decision taken in Moscow, nothing can be done about it.'[81]

From the mid-1950s onwards, first-class forests, the traditional hunting and fishing grounds of the Northern Minorities, were cut down on a massive scale. For example, a one-year plan in Gornaya Shoria in 1990 resulted in the felling of 1.4 million cubic metres of timber using powerful machinery and in such a mechanically and ecologically unsound manner that in many cases almost 40 per cent was wasted, left to rot where it had been cut. The remainder was floated down the rivers, many of which became so choked up that it was possible to cross from one bank to the other without wetting one's feet. The damage done to Siberian forests was enormous: the far east of the country lost 30 per cent of its forests, including 21 per cent in Magadan Oblast, 34 per cent in Primorskiy Krai, 34 per cent in Khabarovskiy Krai, 39 per cent on Sakhalin and 42 per cent in Amur Oblast. At the same time, there was also a sharp decrease in the number of fur animals.

International companies also played a part. According to a 1987 agreement between the USSR and Cuba, the Sukpai Timber Company was established in the far east and given a licence to cut timber in the lands of the Udege, whose livelihood depends entirely on the forests. Similar treaties were signed with North Korea. Today, while cutting the timber, Korean workers poison the rivers, poach and recognize no laws – and the local administration can do nothing to stop them.[81]

Oil and Gas

Oil and gas extraction began in the mid-1960s and also had a negative effect on the North. The largest oil deposits (Surgut and Samotlor) lie in the land of the Khants but they received no compensation for the oil pumped out of their land, while the land itself was destroyed.

One of the most graphic examples of the 'oil war' in the North is the story of Yamal Peninsula. After large gas and oil deposits were found there, a decision was taken to start quick exploration and development of the area even though some experts maintain it is not economically profitable. A technical plan was drawn up which included a south-north railway, a gas-main and several oil wells and rigs. As usual, the rights and needs of the native population were not taken into account so that, for example, the railway was planned in such a way that it cut off the summer deer pastures from the winter ones. The machines moving north destroyed the tundra with the result that five state deer farms in Yamal-Nenets Okrug lost 394,699 hectares of pasture in a few years and more than 24,000 deer. The same happened in other areas, for example, in 1970-87 the deer herd decreased in Magadan Oblast by 15 per cent, in Krasnoyarsk Krai by 30-40 per cent while in Sakhalin it almost ceased to exist.[83]

A. Pika, a Moscow ethno-sociologist who worked in the late 1970s with the Khants near Lake Pyaku-ot, gave the following description of what he saw there ten years later:

'It is difficult to recognize the place. Where there was a realm of virgin land, where one would only seldom meet a fisherman's hut or a deer-breeder's or a hunter's tent, a city has been built. One sees settlements, cross-roads of asphalt highways stretching as far as the eye can see. And between them – black patches of burned forests, vast spaces of man-made deserts, the moss uprooted by caterpillars, oil overflows surrounding oil rigs, gas torches burning day and night, the smoke of forest fires. One gets an impression that man declared war on nature here.'[86]

The indigenous people had no legal rights of redress. All they could do was look in despair as their land, their way of life and their future were quickly and ruthlessly being destroyed. The author remembers, for example, horror on the faces of Eskimos from south-eastern Chukotka when, in 1980, rumours came that oil had been found nearby. One said, 'This is the end, we'll be finished very soon now.' He looked desperate, helpless and resigned. Luckily, the rumours proved untrue.

Discussion and Resistance

After 1985, the situation began to change. In 1987, the Yamal Okrug administration made the first attempt openly to oppose the unchecked industrial development of the area. They openly criticized the Ministries of Oil and Gas, Energy and Transport for their singleminded concern with oil and gas, for ignoring the peoples of the targeted areas and for violating the few laws that were supposed to guard their interests. In actual fact, the Okrug authorities were interested not so much in protection of the natives and their land but in the opportunity to get compensation and additional funding for the Okrug.

In 1988, the Yamal Okrug Soviet banned the building of the railway but the ministries involved simply ignored their decision. In 1989, the Director of the Arctic Department for Oil and Gas Construction (Arktikneftegazstroy), I. Shapovalov, answered a journalist as follows:

'We'll have to come to Yamal anyway. The gas must be supplied by 1991, as planned... No one will change the agreed dates. And we'll not be able to avoid it... we hear so much idle talking, senseless indignation, silly shouts about 'saving' a strip of Yamal land. Come to think of it, it isn't land at all... it has 60% of ice in it.'[87]

The opposite position was expressed by an Evenk poet, A. Nemtushkin, who wrote about another large-scale industrial project, the Turukhan hydro-electric plant:

'Many people think that this [the ecological damage resulting from Northern industrial development] is an unpleasant but necessary evil compared to the advantages that billions of new kilowatts will bring... However, in reality it means destruction of the very basis of the native way of life, comparable to the consequences of a nuclear war. The only difference is that the war would instantly destroy all the life on earth, while ecological disaster will have the same effect, but gradually.'[88]

The devastating activities of industrial giants in the North is caused neither by any special intention to harm the native people, nor by their ecological ignorance (though the latter surely is there), but by the way the economic system itself works. The success of a ministry under central control has been evaluated by only one criterion: how much money it spends. Neither the negative ecological consequences, nor even the profitability is of any interest. It should be obvious that the losses incurred by building a mine and a concentrating mill in the centre of Kamchatka would be higher than any possible profit this project might give, but the ministry is indifferent: the more the project costs, the better for them. The local administration, on the other hand, is very interested in what is built on its land but has no rights.[89] The result is that the only way to affect the final decision in these cases is through publicity.

In February 1989, the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the USSR decided that the existing development plan for Yamal should be suspended, basing its decision on the lack of concrete information on how industrial development would affect the local ecology and relations with the native population. However, the ministries at first ignored even the Presidium. Acting through old and well-established ties of personal and Party influence, they forced the Government to issue 'temporary permissions' – and continued their work. In 1990, the struggle was still going on.

Another example comes from the area where the Khants live near the Sob River. In 1984, large-scale extractions of gravel from the river bed began. As usual, nobody asked for permission either from the local administration or from the Khants. The machinery was shipped in, together with workers from other parts of the country, and the consequences soon became evident: the water balance of the river was destroyed, the river bed and the river bank were altered and, before long, the stocks of sturgeon, formerly plentiful, went down drastically. Also, the incomers robbed the winter huts of the native hunters and the ancient Khant cemetery was vandalized.[90]

The natives tried to protest but without results. Then the

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people from Katravozh, a village on the bank of the Sob, called a meeting and decided to oppose the intruders by other methods. They blocked the river with buoys and fishing boats and refused to let the dredgers go upstream. The Okrug Executive Committee recognized this act as legal. In 1987, it transpired that the excavations were unprofitable and the gravel company withdrew, leaving behind a crippled river.

The saddest part of the story is that the legality or illegality of what the Khants or the gravel company did was not evaluated by the court but by the Okrug executive administration. The idea that the gravel company could be taken to court never occurred to any group in the conflict – to the Khants, the administration, the company – because of the complete dependence of the courts at all levels by the Communist Party structures. The courts always rubber stamped Party decisions.

An illustration of what awaited a native if he or she went to court against an incomer occurred in 1985. An old hunter lived alone on Sakhalin in a small Nivkh village which had been abandoned in the 1960s. He had a licence from the Oblast administration for hunting in the area and also a part-time job as a poaching inspector. Several kilometres away from the village there was a lighthouse where a new keeper, a Russian, came to work. Very soon the Nivkh hunter noticed that the Russian was poaching in his territory, hunting seals and foxes. Finally, he killed a bear.

Bears are sacred animals in Nivkh culture. There is a very elaborate bear cult and a bear may only be killed after a long and complicated ceremony. The old hunter was enraged and, since the law was obviously on his side, took the Russian to court. Yet the court acquitted the Russian and started a case against the Nivkh accusing *him* of poaching. The police searched his house without a warrant, his guns were confiscated even though all were properly licensed, and skins were taken. During the search, a policeman said to the old man, 'You shouldn't have acted against a Russian. See what's going to happen to you now!' The old man was fined by the court, firstly 500 then an extra 200 roubles. The story, one of many, became known for the sole reason that the old man's brother was a well-known Nivkh writer, Vladimir Sangi, who lives in Moscow and is now President of the Association of Northern Minorities and who was influential enough to make the episode public.[91]

The prosecution and punishment of natives who sought justice against the violence of the incomers was common in the 1970s and 1980s. This was the time when the courts, the police, the KGB, the administration and the Press were closely bound by mutual guarantee and by membership in the Party structures, and were ready to bring the immense power of the State down on any 'troublemaker' who dared to question their right to violate the law.

A standard accusation was that of 'nationalistic activities' and, from the early 1930s until recently, this was used many times against natives who tried to oppose the large-scale industrial offensive or to protect traditional culture. The supposed logic behind the accusation was that when an ethnic group opposed the interests of the State, they were thereby committing a 'crime' against the State. To give an indication of the scale of the problem, in Yakutiya, about 3,000 people were arrested between 1950 and 1985 for nationalistic activities.[92] The same crime was used to arrest and incriminate the majority of the Shor intelligentsia. [93]

Servernye Prostory journal is full of bitter letters by native people who mourn their dying motherland, and protest against their lack of rights and denial of free speech. One states:

> ***'I am an Evenk... In our village we now number only about 409 people. Our traditional reindeer-breeding is gradually being curtailed as unprofitable. We have forgotten our language, our traditions, our culture, our arts. There are no natives in the local Executive Committee; outsiders have all the power, but they are not interested in our local problems including ecological ones. A hydro-electric plant is being built on the Adycha river – this means death for nature, as well as for us. Three million cubic metres of timber will go under water, many villages will be pulled down. Where shall we live, what shall we do, where shall we hunt and fish, where shall we get drinking water?... I once had an opportunity to ask A. M. Zoteyev, the Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation: Why don't you take into consideration the interests of the native people? He answered without hesitation: "The interests of the State go first, the interests of the people are subordinate".'***[94]

Before 1985, it never occurred to those in power in the North that indigenous people could make a compensation claim for their devastated land. The Norilsk mining enterprise, one of the largest and richest in the country, which is located in the heart of Taymyr Autonomous Okrug, succeeded in providing relatively high wages, decent food supplies (at least before 1988) and tolerable living conditions for its workers. Yet for several decades it refused to notice the impoverished native population that lived on the land from which it extracted its wealth.[95]

Inequalities

The difference in living standards between the Northern Minorities and the incomers is vast. In the Kamchatkan villages of Oklan, Khairyuzovo, Vovampolka and others, average living space per person is 3-7 sq. m. – about the size of a graveyard plot. Most villages lack the basic utilities; no running water, no central heating, sometimes no electricity. The same disparity in wages, which began in the 1930s, between the native population and incomers remains today.[96] The average monthly wage of an Eskimo sea-hunter in 1988 was generally around 80 roubles while the monthly wage of a Chukotkan miner in 1985 was around 900 roubles and those of a Norilsk miner in 1990

around 1,700 roubles. The living conditions of a native in the Northern villages is three to four times worse than in the Russian Federation[27] in general. At Vostok collective farm on Sakhalin in 1981, the distribution of income was similarly unequal: 36.8 per cent of natives and only 8.4 per cent of non-natives had a salary of 2,400 roubles or less, while 56.6 per cent of non-natives and only 18.7 per cent of natives had a salary of over 4,800 roubles.[28]

The native population is able to find only the lowest paid and least qualified jobs. Unemployment amongst the natives is very high, since their traditional activities have been undermined, declared unprofitable and shut down. In the new jobs, the Northern Minorities can seldom compete with the incomers, not only because their training is worse and their education of poorer quality, but also because many of the key positions in the village, Raion and Oblast administration are taken by non-natives who are often prejudiced against hiring natives. For example, only one director of the 18 Taymyr state farms was a native resident.[29]

Until recently, the law of 'Northern increments' offered an increase of up to 200 per cent for long-term contracts in the North but was given only to the incomers. Around 1985, the law was changed but in practice the wages still differ. For example, in Yamal, the incomer still receives 170 per cent more than is paid for the same job done in the European part of Russia, while a native is only offered 150 per cent more. This contradicts Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (especially Article 20 that demands equal payment for equal labour irrespective of the worker's ethnic affiliation). On the whole, it is difficult to find a single line in this Convention that has not been violated in the North.

GLASNOST AND BEYOND: 1985–1992

As already shown, there was no possibility before 1985 of successfully protesting against policies of the State since the latter had a whole variety of instruments to silence opposition, which it did not hesitate to use. However, by the mid-1980s, even elements within the Communist Party began to realize that the entire Soviet system was moribund, especially in its economic inefficiencies. Cautious changes came initially from the top and, after Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded as General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985, these accelerated. Countless popular movements developed throughout the USSR – democratic, nationalist, environmental – and the situation rapidly took on its own momentum.

Grassroots Protest

Change came later and more slowly for the Northern Minorities than for the rest of the country, perhaps because of the vastness of their territory. The following stories of two villages, Sikachi-Alyan in Khabarovskiy Krai and Paren in Kamchatkan Oblast, are helpful in illustrating the effects of this change on the indigenous peoples in general.

In 1970, a Nanai fishing cooperative was closed by the local administration in Sikachi-Alyan. As a result, unemployment soared, alcoholism and crime increased and the younger people moved to neighbouring towns. Next, the village Soviet was disbanded and the administration moved to a larger Russian settlement. The inhabitants were forced to hand over to the State taiga land which had belonged to the village, as well as to give up their fishing sites to a State-owned fishing company. Without the permission of the Nanais, health centres for workers from neighbouring towns were established in and around the village, along with private *dachas*.

In the summer of 1989, however, the picture suddenly changed. People began to protest against the building of these *dachas* and health centres and the village council was re-established. Also, a 25-strong fishing team was organized to supply the village with fish while a construction team of 13 people was created to build new houses. Unemployment disappeared.

Currently, the Nanais' main demand is that land which belonged to their community before 1960 should be restored to them. At the same time, the village administration is studying the legal problems posed by the health centres and *dachas*. They would like to set a rent for the land and use the money for the needs of the village but, if this is refused, they are ready to take the matter to court with the help of the Association of Northern Minorities.

In Kamchatka, as late as 1986, the Raion Council launched a campaign to shut down the village of Paren because of its alleged unprofitability. At first, they tried to talk the people into moving voluntarily and to switch to the work of reindeer breeders. Then, when they failed, they threatened to dismantle the electric power plant and to shut down the shop.

However, the times had changed. When the Raion Council's delegation came to the village to 'persuade' and threaten, it was met by a well-organized rally and posters saying, 'The Povtylo tribe will never leave the land of their ancestors!' The local and central Press heard of the protests and published scores of articles and letters from the villagers. One letter read: 'The relocation of Paren population will mean one thing: we, the Paren Koryaks, will lose our language, our customs, traditions and skills. What could be worse than that?' Currently, the joint efforts of the Povtylos, the Press and some politicians, have succeeded in at least suspending the elimination of the village.[96]

Independent political and social structures began to appear throughout the North and 1989 was an especially fruitful year in this respect. For example, an association called 'Yamal for Our Descendants' was established which opposed the ecological destruction of the Yamal Peninsula. In Leningrad, the Siberian Cultural Centre was founded with the aim of uniting all Northern Minority people who live in the city and of supporting their political and cultural actions against the local Russian administration in the North.

In 1989 in Kolpashevo, a village of the Tomsk Oblast, a constituent assembly of 87 delegates established the Society of Tomsk Sel'kups. One of its major demands was the restoration of ethnic Sel'kup village soviets in areas of high-density Sel'kup population.[97] In the same year, the Association of Kola Saami was set up by Saami people. 'The Association is an independent non-governmental organization which is called upon to promote the social and economic development of this ethnic minority, to preserve its traditions based on the harmony of man and nature, and to study and develop its cultural and spiritual heritage.'[98]

Another constituent assembly took place in the summer of 1990 in Provideniya (Chukotka). This was the Regional Society of the Eskimos and its 52 delegates came from six important villages in the area. The main goals of the society are to fight for the right of native priority to land-usage, for the right to pursue traditional industries, for the introduction of taxation of all organizations using the land, and for cultural revival.

First Congress of Northern Minorities

A very important event in the history of Northern Minority political struggle occurred in March 1990 when the First Congress of Northern Minorities took place in Moscow. Despite an element of government manipulation, especially at the beginning, the Congress overcame this and adopted several important resolutions as well as establishing the Association of Northern Minorities with Vladimir Sangi as chairman. Its goal was bluntly formulated: 'To unite all our strengths in order to survive'.

The delegates stressed that only seven out of the 26 Northern Minorities have formal ethnic autonomous structures. Therefore, alongside the necessity to re-establish National Raions and indigenous village Soviets, the Congress recommended a return to tribal Soviets and Councils of Elders as forms of self-administration. They also demanded legal confirmation of traditional land-usage in areas populated by the Northern Minorities and that industrial projects in the North should be evaluated by a local indigenous organization. Thus, indigenous village Soviets should be given exclusive rights to control both land and water usage and reserved territories might be established to protect traditional life. The Congress also noted a very low level of education and medical service amongst the Northern Minorities and called for special measures concerning their languages and cultures.

The Congress addressed the Soviet Government and demanded immediate ratification of the 'Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries'. This had been adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 1989 but its principles needed to be observed throughout the USSR.[99]

However small in numbers the Northern Minorities may be, they do have an intelligentsia of their own, including well-known writers, social workers, scholars and politicians who live in the larger cities and have access to the information and to decision-makers on Northern Minority policy, both on a national and international level. This group, together with the educational, cultural and social workers in the villages, plays an important part in formulating and promoting ideas that can help all the Northern Minorities. Undoubtedly, their membership and participation in the movement is sure to grow.

Government Actions

A widespread discussion of the catastrophic situation facing the Northern Minorities started after 1985 and has already begun to cause changes in government policy.[100] For example, in the cultural sphere, the Council of Ministers issued an edict in 1989 that school classes in the Ul'chi, Yukagir, Itel'men, Dolgan and Nivkh languages should be resumed. New programmes for instruction in reindeer breeding, hunting and fur farming have been introduced. Northern Minority newspapers which had been closed in the early 1930s (the only exceptions were the Khants, Nenets and Chukchee papers) are now slowly reappearing.

In August 1989, the Even-Bytantai National Raion was established. It was the first in several decades and serves a compact group of about 1,000 Evens who live in a territory of 55,600 sq. km. The National Raion is a reserved area and the Raion Soviet has a deciding vote on all questions of industrial and other development in the region. The right of the Evens to their traditional way of life is secured by local law.[101]

In 1990, the Soviet Parliament passed two laws which have a direct bearing on the Northern Minority situation. One of these, 'On General Principles of Local Self-Administration' (9 April),[102] contains several sections which can be used by the Northern Minorities to improve their situation.

Section 2, Paragraph 3 states: 'Village Soviet, settlement, Raion, town and part of town can be considered as primary territorial units of self-administration.' This allows an ethnic group to establish its own administrative body which would include local people.

Section 8 sets an economic basis for self-administration: natural resources (land, minerals, water, forests, vegetable and animal life), communal and other property is to serve as a source of local income and to satisfy the social and economic needs of the population of a given territory.

Section 11 states: 'Economic relations between local administrations and industrial enterprises, and organizations that are not communal property, should be based on taxation and agreements.'

Section 23 is also very important: 'The establishment and reorganization of industrial and social enterprises that are using natural resources of a given territory should be carried out only in accordance with the consent of local Soviets... Enterprises... irrespective of their affiliation... should get permission from the local Soviet for any kind of activity affecting the ecology, demography etc. of a given territory.'

The other law passed in 1990, 'On Free Ethnic Development of the Citizens of the USSR who Live outside their Ethnic Territories or have no such Territories within the USSR' (26 April), is even more important. This allows for the establishment, in areas which are heavily populated by an ethnic group, of indigenous territorial units like National Raions and indigenous village Soviets. These can be created if, through an expression of free will, the majority of the population demands them (Section 7). At the same time, an ethnic territorial unit may be established if an ethnic group does not constitute a majority of the population; an extremely important provision for the majority of the Northern Minority population at the end of the 20th Century.

The political situation in the Russian Federation is now changing rapidly since normal political life has emerged from fear and muteness. After the 1989 elections to the Supreme Soviet (the Union Parliament), many deputies began to make public the violations of human and indigenous rights that had been occurring in the North for decades. Papers and journals were filled with inquiries from deputies and perplexed and helpless replies from ministers, who had previously been accustomed to accounting only to the Communist Party. As a result, many industrial projects in the North were cancelled or suspended.

The establishment of the Association of Northern Minorities became a powerful stimulus for political movements of Northern Minorities all over the country. Groups of qualified experts worked on the legal, economic, ecological and social aspects of the Northern Minorities' situation. New laws provided the indigenous peoples, at least theoretically, with a vastly improved legal standing.

In December 1991, the USSR finally broke apart. The new Russian State, formerly the Russian Federation, took over all the international and internal obligations and problems of the former USSR, including those of the Northern Minorities. However, much of the former opposition is still in existence in the form of the Oblast, Okrug and Raion administrations and the industrial lobby. The major economic switch from a centralized economy to a free market one are bound to affect the Northern Minorities, as it will all the population, although the long-term effects will take some time to emerge.

The actual situation of the indigenous peoples has yet to change dramatically but today there is hope that, protected by consistent laws and assisted by a free press that gives their voices a chance to be heard, Russia's native peoples will find the moral strength to rise from the catastrophic situation in which they have found themselves after 70 years of totalitarian rule.

THE WAY AHEAD

Much of what has happened in the North probably could not have been avoided. The incomers would have arrived in any case; the industrial development, timber cutting, oil and gas extraction would have started under any conditions; the influence of the Russian language and the process of cultural divergence were inevitable. Developments like these take place all over the world, and it would be naive to pretend that they can be reversed or ignored. One estimate is that up to 50 per cent of the world's languages will become extinct during the coming century.[108]

Is There Hope for Northern Minorities?

Governmental wisdom is needed, together with knowledge and patience, to make the process of development as least painful and complicated as possible for indigenous peoples. The world presents many different models and patterns of transition. For example, in Greenland, Denmark conducted for centuries a policy of total governmental control over all the native populations' contacts with the outside world. The United States and Australia chose to set up reserves for their remaining indigenous peoples. Today, these three countries are attempting to rectify the mistakes of the past.

Unfortunately, the Soviet experience seems to be the least successful. Instead of trying to mitigate the negative consequences of its policies, government actions have reinforced and intensified them by speeding up assimilation and by aiding the disintegration of traditional social organizations, cultures and indigenous languages. Its obvious ultimate goal was the 'melting down' of various ethnic groups into one single unit, 'the Soviet people'.

It is possible that the original intentions were good. Those who determined the policies in the North may have believed quite sincerely that they were beneficial: that the Nivkhs of Sakhalin would be more comfortable in larger modern settlements; that the Eskimos, born sea-hunters, needed protection and should not be allowed to hunt in their skin-boats for their own security; that the Naukan Eskimos would be happy to leave their cliffs and settle down in a Chukchee village. However, even good intentions, implemented by force, unsupported by knowledge, and without an effective mechanism of two-way communication between the central power and the people, inevitably fail.

This failure was marked by the fact that the Northern Minorities had no administrative territorial units and local organs of power that could secure their rights and protect traditional forms of economic, social and cultural life in accordance with an effective legal code. From the late 1920s, all the essential decisions in the North were made at higher administrative levels: in Oblast, Republic, Central Parliament, Ministries, or, more often, Communist Party structures.

The Northern Minorities suffered from the same tragic consequences of the totalitarian Communism that embraced the whole country. However, since they were small in number and much more vulnerable, the pressure on them was much stronger.

'The people of the North live a completely different life compared to other peoples of the USSR, to the extent that the constitutional equal rights they have do not mean real equality. Special protection is needed of their environment, their way of life, their right to control their economic development.'[109]

To find a way forward, great efforts are needed. Much work will be required from the Northern Minorities themselves, as well as the special attention and professional work of experts and politicians over the coming years.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution may be in reserved territories of a specific type. This is partly a revival of Vladimir Bogoraz's approach which he formulated in the early 1920s, that the only way to protect and save the native peoples was to establish and secure by law special areas of taiga and tundra, rivers and seas, for their exclusive use. These ideas, that would have been considered 'seditious' and 'anti-Soviet' before 1985, are today rapidly gaining support.

Yet, in fact, over a decade before *glasnost*, the creation of reserves had been tentatively suggested. For example, in 1970, a Leningrad biologist, B.A. Tikhomirov, recommended the establishment of a chain of national parks on the Taymyr Peninsula where only the Northern Minorities would be allowed to hunt. This suggestion, presented to an academic symposium on wild reindeer, was heavily criticized as 'propaganda of reserves', and was never published.[110] Similar ideas applying to other areas came from a Leningrad linguist and anthropologist, E.A. Kreinovich, but were not published either.

The concept of 'biosphere' national parks was also put forward. In the early 1980s, Soviet economist N.I. Chesnokov, proposed the establishment in western Siberia of a network of a new type of national parks, which were to include both territories reserved for the traditional economic and cultural activities of Northern Minorities, including hunting, and also areas where hunting, fishing and even entry would be forbidden to anyone.

When, in 1982–5, such a national park was established close to the border of Evenk Autonomous Okrug and Turukhan Krai, it included a 'core' where no hunting was allowed and also large parcels of land for Kets, Evenks and Sel'kups.[111] Professor L.S. Bogoslovskaya, a Moscow ecologist, and her colleagues are working on plans for a similar national park ('Beringia') to cover the ethnic territory of the Eskimos and the Maritime Chukchee in south-eastern Chukotka and south-western Alaska.

The Samotlor Practicum

In 1989, a representative meeting of 35 scholars expert on the Northern Minorities took place in Tyumen.[112] The 'Samotlor Practicum' suggested three possible paths for the future evolution of the North. The first was 'non-interference', the second was 'reserved territories' and the third was 'cultural assimilation'. The majority of the experts voted, with certain additions and changes, for the second path.

They stressed that the previous paternalistic approach of 'Big Brother' was both immoral and non-productive and that every ethnic group, like every individual, should have a right to choose between a traditional and a modern way of life (or a combination of the two). This choice should not be offered only once in a lifetime but opportunities for choosing either way should be permanently available.

One group of experts (L. Bogoslovskaya, V. Kalyakin, I. Krupnik, V. Lebedev, A. Pika) insisted that the concept of 'ethnic territories' and the basic idea of the priority of indigenous subsistence and economic activities should be legally recognized and secured by law. They suggested any future law should contain the following principles in order to regulate relations between indigenous peoples and the State:

1. A Northern Minority village that traditionally uses certain land, forest, tundra, river, etc. should have the deciding vote in all questions of allocations of these territories to any industrial enterprise or ministry.
2. Any 'amalgamation', relocation, liquidation of villages by an outside decision should be legally forbidden.
3. The environmental protection law should be extended to cover preservation of traditional industries and subsistence systems.
4. General, large-scale programmes for the economic and social development of the North should be replaced by specific small-scale projects for smaller areas, with careful regard to specific ecological systems and traditions.
5. Large-scale industrial projects in the North should be submitted not only to independent ecologists but also to independent ethnologists.[113]

Many experts from the Samotlor Practicum agreed that Northern Minorities should be given effective instruments with which to choose their future themselves, such as referenda. Theoretically, the idea of self-determination is an excellent one, but considering the immense social, cultural and psychological effects of totalitarianism, are the Northern Minorities still capable of finding enough energy and knowledge to take their destiny completely into their own hands?

In all probability, some outside help will be needed, including economic assistance as well as social and psychological support, in order to restore the initiative and to return the native people socially and psychologically to the integrity of the early 1920s.

All the experts came to the conclusion that every attempt to improve the situation of the Northern Minorities would be ineffective without profound legislative change. First, the areas populated by the indigenous peoples must be given effective autonomy. They must also be as decentralized as possible, in the form of indigenous Raions or, preferably, indigenous villages/Soviets. These should be underpinned by two principles: legal guarantees to land and budgetary allocations made directly to the minorities. The first principle would include a government programme to support the traditional use of land and resources. It would contain legal guarantees of rights to an indigenous area, Raion, village etc. as well as a final veto on forced alienation or rental of land in any form and for any purposes. The establishment of the Even-Bytantai National Raion in 1989 was a step towards this goal.

The second principle of budgetary allocations creates complications. At present, when the central government (be it Soviet or Russian) allots certain funding with the aim to 'secure development of the areas populated by Northern Minorities', the money almost invariably goes to the existing industrial and agricultural structures of the Raion, Okrug or Oblast: factories, collective and state farms, where the Northern Minorities are often a minority.

To reverse this, compensations and royalties should be paid directly to Northern Minorities, both to recompense the people for past exploitation and damage and to pay for future use of their natural resources. In addition, they should be allotted not a proportional part of the national budget but, in accordance with European experience of regional support, a larger share: after all, they are much more vulnerable and comparatively poorer than the rest of the population.

However, the main problem is not the amount of money but its distribution for, at present, the latter remains under the full control of Oblast, Okrug and Raion administrations and these include very few indigenous representatives. Even if the compensations are paid, they will be channelled to build housing and new public buildings in larger settlements and towns, to improve the road system in and around the towns, to import furniture, food, clothes, cars and so on. They will never be used to support the development of traditional indigenous villages, life or cultures.

It is understandable perhaps that the democratically elected Oblast government should try to satisfy the needs of the majority but the rights of the Northern Minorities can never be secured if they are not protected by special laws aimed at putting them in a privileged position. This is the only effective instrument to secure equality. The importance and indispensability of special legislation for the Northern Minorities has become self-evident.

Language and Culture

Although the languages of the Northern Minorities are taught in schools in the North, education in its present form can provide little or no support for their preservation. There is a shortages of teachers, schools and books. The teachers are often young people who are themselves not proficient in the Northern Minority languages while the techniques of teaching them as 'mother-tongues' through primers, reading and writing, a technique which was developed in the 1930s, is now

hopelessly outdated.

In Surgut and Nizhnevartovsk (inhabited by the Khants), there was not one qualified Khant-speaking educationalist in 1988. No Yukagir language teacher could be found for the primary school in Nelemnoye in 1987 and no Aleut language teacher could be found for Nikolskoye school in 1984. In 1991, when an announcer for the Anadyr-based Eskimo language radio programme retired, no substitute could be found.

The terrible blows suffered by the Northern Minorities may prove to be fatal for many of their languages. Yet it may not be too late for some of these to be revitalized, as has happened elsewhere in the world. Referring to the Canadian Inuits, Louis-Jacques Dorais states:

> ***'the future of Inuit language and culture is linked to the preservation of a strong local identity, which, in turn, stems from a world-view where native and non-native knowledge are harmoniously integrated.'***[114]

Even so, the complete loss of their native language by the younger generation does not necessarily signify total assimilation and loss of ethnic identity. Evenks in Buryatiya, for whom either Russian or Buryat is now their native tongue, still consider themselves Evenk. The Nenets, assimilated linguistically to the Komi, call themselves Nenets. The Eskimos who now speak only Russian identify themselves as Eskimos.[115] To build on the remaining languages, whatever they may be, provides hope for the cultural survival of the Northern Minorities.

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DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The collapse of the totalitarian system has opened new possibilities for positive change for the Northern Minorities, to acknowledge past mistakes and to introduce new policies. For some especially vulnerable communities it may already be too late. For many there is still a future – if the Government will act with sufficient commitment and vigour on their behalf, taking into consideration both the needs expressed by the Northern Minorities themselves and the recommendations of independent experts and non-governmental organizations.

Political and Legal Rights

- Reserved territories in the form of biosphere national parks within Russia should be established for the exclusive use of the Northern Minorities.
- All territorial rights should be enshrined in legal instruments, and be capable of being enforced through legal means. International legal standards should be observed.
- Any amalgamation, relocation or liquidation of Northern Minority communities by an outside decision, however important these might be considered for industrial, military or other development, should be legally forbidden.
- Northern Minority communities should receive an agreed fixed share of the national budget directly, not via Raion or Oblast administrative bodies.
- The administration of the Northern Minorities' territories should, as far as possible, be decentralized to community level in order to benefit indigenous populations.
- Independent social movements and non-governmental organizations of the Northern Minorities should receive governmental support and serve as mediators between the Government and the Northern peoples.
- Within the Russian State, the Northern Minorities should have special protection (group rights) as small and historically underprivileged minority groups.

Economic Rights

- The Northern Minorities have lived on the resources of their lands for centuries and should have legal and inalienable rights over traditional territories, resources and activities.
- No new large-scale economic projects should be permitted in the territories inhabited by the Northern Minorities without their consent. All new projects should be subject to evaluation and discussion by the northern people and independent experts and, as a final measure, to a binding veto by the concerned community.
- All economic projects presently in operation should be re-evaluated by the Northern Minorities' local administrative bodies as well as independent experts to determine likely ethnological and ecological costs to the people and the environment.
- The environmental damage inflicted through past industrial development and resource extraction should be acknowledged by the State and the principle of compensation should be accepted.
- The Environment Preservation law should be extended to cover preservation of traditional industries and subsistence systems.
- The Northern Minorities should have equality in employment, earnings and social benefits with other citizens.

Language and Cultural Rights

- The local administrative bodies of the Northern Minorities should have control over cultural, educational and language matters within their jurisdiction.
- The use of indigenous languages should be promoted within local communities and, where possible, in government and regional affairs.
- Indigenous languages should, wherever possible, be an equal medium of instruction in primary education along with Russian, and their use at secondary and higher levels should be encouraged.
- Work should continue on developing written language forms and literatures for all Northern Minority languages. New teaching methods and materials should be developed and used in schools.
- Education of the Northern Minority children should encourage a sense of pride in, and identity with, their own language, culture and way of life.
- In the settled areas, the boarding-school system should be ended immediately for all Northern Minority children and alternative community-based systems should be developed. For the nomadic population this system should be kept only where absolutely necessary.
- If it is necessary for older children to be educated away from their home for extended periods, family and community links should be maintained.
- All legislation and instructions relating to the Northern Minorities should be published in Russian and, where possible, also in indigenous languages and be openly available to local administrators and local people.
- The Russian Government should educate all other communities about the Northern Minorities in order to lessen prejudice and discrimination against them.

International Rights

- The Russian Government should submit its administration of the Northern Minorities to outside scrutiny, including the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, as well as independent academic and non-governmental organizations worldwide.
- The Russian Government should ratify and observe all international conventions which affect indigenous populations.

SOURCES

Abbreviations used for journals (j) and newspapers (n) in the footnotes:

I *Izvestiya* (n)

ZN *Zhizn' natsional'nostey* ('Life of Nations', 1922–1924) (j)

LoP *Lovozerskaya Pravda* (n)

LR *Literaturnaya Rossiya* (n)

SA *Severnaya Asia* ('Northern Asia', Journal of the Committee of the North, 1925-1931) (j)

SP *Severnye Prostory* ('Northern Expanses',1985–) (j)

RG *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (n)

SAr *Sovetskaya Arktika* ('Soviet Arctic', journal on Northern peoples and economy – largely Communist Party propaganda – 1936-1941) (j)

SS *Sovetskiy Sever* ('Soviet North', journal of the Committee of the North, 1930–1935) (j)

QS *Questions sibériennes* (1990), Institut du Monde soviétique et de l'Europe Centrale et Orientale. Edité sous la direction de Boris Chichlo. Paris (j)

FOOTNOTES

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19 *ZN*, Nos.3-4, 1923, p.172; *SS*, No.2, 1934, p.9.

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29 *ZN*, No.1, 1923, pp.251-4.

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31 Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p.80.

32 *SS*, No.2, 1930, p.22 ff.

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36 In 1953, the project was moved to Hertzen State Pedagogical Institute (which was granted University status in 1990), where teachers for Northern schools are being trained to this day.

37 *SS*, No.1, 1930, p.42.

38 *SA*, No.3, 1925, p.114.

39 *SAr*, No.7, 1938, p.106. The Stalinist purges of the 1930s–1950s were absolutely devastating for research on the North. W.G. Bogoraz died in 1936, luckily too early to witness the arrest of his best and most talented friends and colleagues. Ya.P.Al'kor, L. Ya. Shternberg, E.A.Kreinovich, G.M. Vasilevich, A.M. Zolotarev, S.I. Rudenko, W. Schneider, N. Forstein and many others were murdered. Those who survived had their work suppressed for decades. S.N. Stebnitskiy, A. Pyrerka, N.G. Schnakenburg, D.G. Verbov, G.M. Korsakov were killed during the Second World War. The next wave of purges came in 1952 with the publication of Stalin's notorious book, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, which was used as a pretext for launching a wide campaign against those few remaining linguists and cultural and educational workers who still retained some knowledge and skills.

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